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ALFRED DE MUSSET

AND

THE WORKMAN'S WAGE

A NOVEL.

BY

JOHN MURPHY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY W. A. R. MONTAGUE

NEW YORK:

DOUGLASS

LONDON



GEMS FROM THE FRENCH

THREE NOVELETTES

AND

VALENTINE'S WAGER

A COMEDY

BY

ALFRED DE MUSSET

TRANSLATED BY E. DE V. VERMONT.

New York:

BRENTANO'S

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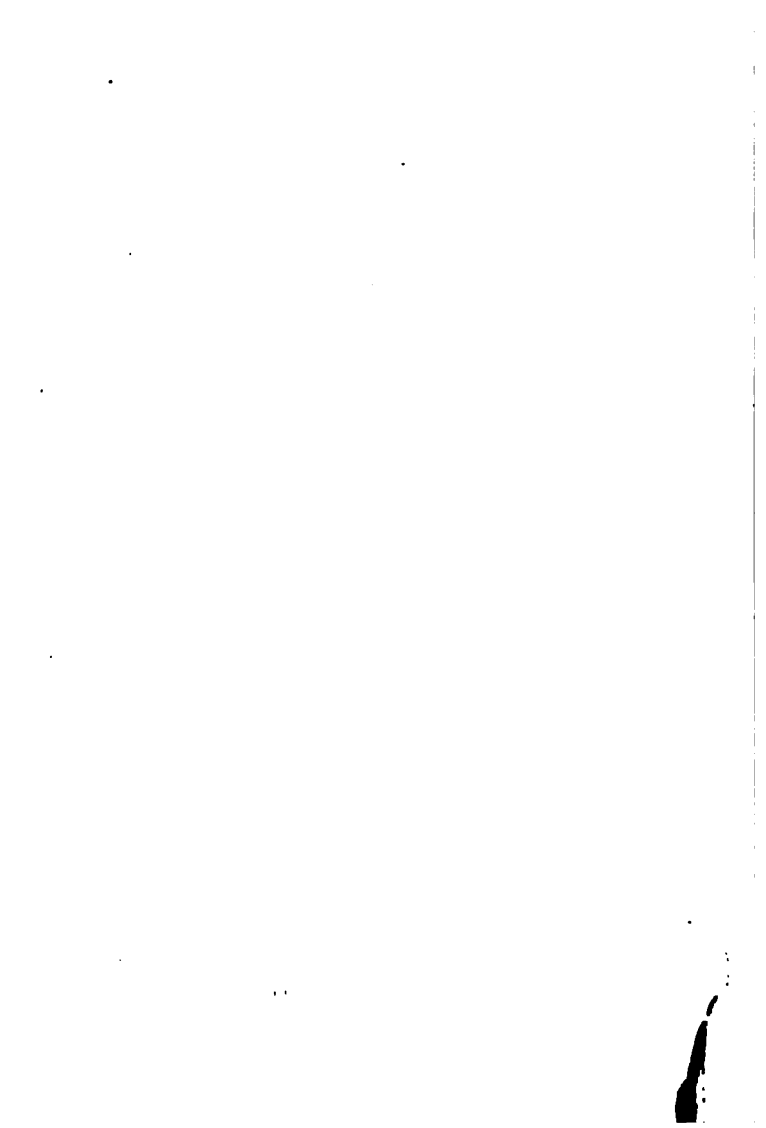
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
A FEW WORDS ABOUT MUSSET.	9
MARGOT.	37
THE BEAUTY-SPOT.	119
CROISILLES	183
VALENTIN'S WAGER	236

312134



A FEW WORDS ABOUT MUSSET.

“On va s'imaginer que c'est une préface.

Moi qui n'en lis jamais !—Ni vous non plus, je crois.”

—[*La Coupe et les Lèvres.*

I HAVE no doubt but that the name on the cover of this little book will alarm many minds imperfectly informed as to the true character of the choice spirit who, for some few, too short, years, bore in this world the name of Alfred de Musset. Indeed this poet of untrammelled ways,

“ . . . qui garda pour ses dieux
L'audace et la fierté,”

ever possessed the fatal gift of arousing by his disdain the active hostility of society's Pharisees,—the serried ranks

“Des tartufes de mœurs, comédiens insolents
Qui mettent leur vertu en mettant leurs gants blancs.”

And even among those whose irreproachable lives render them indulgent toward the

weaknesses of their fellow-men, one finds only too many who do not hesitate to charge the magic power of Musset's genius, combined with the example of a life bereft of all strengthening and consoling illusions, with that relaxing influence which, during the past sixty years, has acted so disastrously upon the rising generations of France.

In a single cruel and decisive word, Musset, the luminous poet, the architect of so many dainty fabrics of the imagination, has been branded on the forehead with the withering stigma of a corrupter of youth.

Let me, here, once and for all, reassure the reader, by declaring that this grave accusation, whether well or ill-founded, can not, in any case, bear upon the three *historiettes* and the exquisite *comedietta*, an English translation of which is here presented for the first time.

The grace, the immaculate innocence of *Margot*; *Croisilles'* good-humor and ingenuity in devising expedients; the *rococo* little adventure of the young *Chevalier de Vauvert*, at the court of the famous favorite; the loves of *Valentin* and *Cécile*;—none of these gems of fiction, brimming over, as they are, with alert life, in all their refined felicity of

expression, could possibly afford the slightest pretext for puritanical cavilling.

If, then, I see fit to break a lance in behalf of the renowned poet, let it be clearly understood, from the outset, that the present volume must remain, in any case, unaffected by the issue. The views I express incidentally as to the bearing of an author's private life upon our appreciation of his works, find no practical application whatever in these four unimpeachable examples of our writer's work.

In spite of my horror of anything which resembles in the remotest degree the "encyclopedia article" style of writing, I find myself obliged to slip in some few words of biography, in order to so pose my subject that he may appear not as the ogre, greedy to devour young innocence, who is the Musset of popular belief, but *in propria persona*, in his simplicity of character, his unassailable honesty, his unwavering loyalty to himself and to his readers. Besides, has he not said of Nature that,

"Quand elle pétrit ces nobles créatures,
Elle qui voit là-haut comme on vit ici-bas,
Elle sait des secrets qui les font assez pures
Pour que le monde entier ne les lui souille pas ?

And these verses, in which no personal application, certainly, ever entered his thoughts, form the most appropriate epigraph for the few pages, at once memoir and apology, which I am about to offer in behalf of the famous fellow-pupil of the Orleans princes.

Of an ancient race of the Vendôme country—that soil which, at the same period, witnessed the unfolding of Balzac's glorious genius,—the Vicomte Alfred de Musset-Pathay reckoned among his direct ancestors poets like Colin de Musset, the contemporary and friend of Thibaut, Comte de Champagne, in the days of the last Crusades,—warriors like Alexandre de Musset, the companion in arms of Maurice de Saxe ; whilst, among the illustrious alliances of his house we find Catherine du Lys, a niece of Jeanne d'Arc, and a du Bellay,—a name eloquent of poetic reminiscences.

For his knightly device—beneath the golden sparrow-hawk, the ancient blazon of a long line of seigneurs—he bore these words, replete with the proud spirit of chivalry, gentle to the weak, fearless in the onslaught :
—*Courtoisie et Bonne Aventure aux Preux.*

Of the noble domains thus baptized, the

second—later on the inheritance of Alfred de Musset—served, in days gone by, as the mysterious nest of Antoine de Bourbon's light *amours*—the same Antoine known to history as the husband of the austere Jeanne d'Albret and the father of Henry the Great, King of France and Navarre.

Thus it was that the most polished, as well as the most passionate, of French poets traced his descent through a line distinguished for valor in the field as well as for wisdom in the council-chamber and intellectual culture. The father of Alfred and Paul—those two brothers united by such tender affection—knew how to blend in himself the diverse characteristics of a race devoted to noble utterances, noble deeds, and noble thoughts.

Faithful at heart to the extinguished star of the Napoléons, Victor de Musset was not wanting to the worthy traditions of his house, and it was in an atmosphere of exquisite refinement and unfaltering affection that this child of genius came into the world and grew to manhood.

And yet this nest of domestic love, so tenderly shielded against the brunt of life and of fortune, could not escape the disturbing influences of a troubled epoch. Born in 1810,

Alfred and Paul de Musset spelt out their first lessons from the bulletins of the *Grande Armée*, and shed their first tears of true bitterness over the terrible catastrophe of the Emperor. "These children were drops of that boiling blood which had flooded the earth ; they were born in the bosom of war, for war.—They had not been outside of their native town, but they had been told that through each of its gates the road led to one of the capitals of Europe. They carried in their heads a whole world ;—and now they looked upon the earth and the heavens, upon the streets and roads ;—all was empty." Sent to the Lyceum at a very early age, and brought into contact, thenceforward, with the ultra-nervous generation of the time, Alfred felt a passionate interest in that gigantic series of epic events from which Europe was still trembling and France had not yet ceased to bleed. The society of those days offered nothing that could replace the ideal which had vanished with the last breath of the Man of St. Helena, and these young imaginations were developed in a baleful state of ferment, placed "between a past they were being taught to abhor and a future as yet impenetrable." For some, the love of holy liberty could suffice ; to others, art, with its feverish

enthusiasms, offered momentary relief ; but many more,—tenderer organisms, temperament more easily unhinged,—despondent at having come “ too late into too old a world,” had now, for their educator, consoler, motive force, nothing but “ the spirit of the age, angel of the twilight which is neither night nor day ; they found him sitting upon a sack of lime full of bones, wrapped in the mantle of the egoist and shivering horribly with cold.” Of these, the rich became libertines, while others, deliberately assuming a semblance of enthusiasm which found its expression in loud-sounding words, flung themselves into a troubled sea of aimless action ;—“ but there was none who did not, on coming home at night, feel bitterly the emptiness of his life and the poverty of his hands.”

In the literature of the first quarter of the century there was, alas ! nothing to snatch these young souls from the horror of this despair. Of the three men who moulded the thoughts of those years, from 1810 to 1830,—Goethe, Chateaubriand, and Byron,—none had been able to escape the deathly power of this moral Juggernaut. If the author of “ *Attala*,” in the bitterness of disappointed ambition, “ wrapped the repulsive idol in his

Pilgrim's cloak, and set it upon an altar of marble," Goethe, rich, happy, at his ease, did not hesitate to depict, in "Werther," the passion that leads to suicide, and to trace, in "Faust," the lineaments of the most lurid human figure that ever stood for evil and misfortune. Byron, and Byron alone, flung to the echoes the cry of an anguish he had lived, and "suspended Manfred over the abyss as though the answer to the hideous enigma which surrounded him were—annihilation." Art itself, eschewing the calming influences of the classic era, felt, during the incipient stages of its transformation, the throbbings and writhings of this great social agony. The eighteenth century having worked a total wreck of memories, beliefs, and institutions, the nineteenth was slow to restore these scattered ruins. The peasant and the artisan alone, the chains of their bondage cast to the four winds, gloated over the long-coveted soil and the implements of emancipated labor,—but the offspring of an ancient lineage, the young noble, bereft of all his privileges, saw no place left for him under the sun, and found but one door open—a wide and singularly tempting portal,—the door of facile pleasures,

How strange must this picture appear,—almost fictitious in our times and in this country—a land of infinite possibilities, an era of prodigally expended energy! How difficult it is for one who has not given some years of his life to a retrospective study of the condition of Europe prior to 1830, to account for the existence, at that time, of so many generous beings, whose vitality and vigor, and the source of whose activity, were completely unenlightened as to either their own aims or the direction of their probable issues!

Hence the strange and irrational Grecian campaign to which may be distinctly traced the origin of that still gaping wound, the Eastern Question; hence, too,—from these chaotic conditions hard to understand at this distance of time,—blighted lives like those of Byron and of Musset, and hundreds of other abortive existences, humbler victims to that “crack,” as Alphonse Daudet would ingeniously name it, through which, day after day, energies and ambitions leaked irretrievably.

In the case of Alfred de Musset it may be truly said that this disillusion of mind and heart were not due to any insensible process of intellectual and moral disintegration; he had breathed it with the atmosphere

in which it was his lot to be born, and to such surroundings his delicate temperament could not be exposed without fatal results.

Our poet was still very young when he sought in literature some relief from his mysterious and unexplained mental torments. The exclusive study of philosophy had attracted, without captivating, him; some efforts in the direction of a medical career had only produced disgust. A volume of André Chénier, eagerly perused in 1828, elicited its first notes from his young lyre. This "Élégie," judged by its author unworthy of publication, was followed by a short romantic drama—likewise unpublished—in which there manifested itself the somewhat oppressive influence of the new art *cul-tus* whose high priest was Victor Hugo, and whose devotees were Vigny, Mérimée, Sainte Beuve, Deschamps, and many minor luminaries. Finally, Musset published, in the same year, a lengthy paraphrase of de Quincey's "Confessions of an Opium Eater,"—strange pastime for any but this impressionable and melancholy youth! In 1830, appeared the "Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie," the first volume which saw the light under the name of Alfred de Musset. These

verses are now inserted at the beginning of his collected poetical works, preceded by a charming sonnet, dated 1840, and ending with the following words, so expressive in their simple eloquence :

“ Mes premiers vers sont d'un enfant,
Les seconds d'un adolescent,
Les derniers à peine d'un homme.”

It is, nevertheless, easy to perceive, in these first efforts, precociously perfect in form and in originality of idea, that good sense which had guided the lad even amid the extravagant exuberance of the *Cénacle* of Victor Hugo. One cannot help recognizing that before attaining his majority he had already constructed for himself an independent theory of poetic expression, and that he would accept no advice, nor follow the footsteps of any one, from the day when, after having taken much thought and listened well to the measures of others, he should utter the cry of Correggio,—“ I, too, am a poet ! ”

The charming writer, who, for long after the death of a fondly loved brother, sustained the literary reputation of the Mussets, depicts with much *verve* the remarkable

transformations which our hero underwent at this period. "Manhood had come. At the time of his début, the winter before, women had paid no attention to this little fellow who would conscientiously go through the steps his dancing-master had taught him ; but in a few months his figure developed ; he lost his childish look, his timid manner. His face almost suddenly assumed a marked expression of assurance and pride ; his look became so firm, so full of question and curiosity, that people could hardly bear his gaze with indifference." It was at about this period that Prosper Chalais said of the precocious young writer : " Seeing him with that face of his, that eagerness for the pleasures of the world, that air of a young colt let loose, and noting the looks he directed towards women and their answering glances, I feared for him at the hands of the Dalilahs."

They came—the sorceresses ! The poet succumbed to their incantations ; but his raptures of delight, his cries of anguish, his imprecations, he has known how to embody in some of the finest verses written in any language,—lines traced with his heart's blood, and of which he could himself say :

" Rien ne nous rend si grands qu'une grande douleur."

Legend, which begins so soon to graft itself upon the true story of famous lives, was not to spare Musset. It must perforce make of him, in the eyes of his contemporaries, and, still more, in the eyes of their posterity, a man of insatiable appetites, of depraved and overmastering impulses,—in a word, the victim of a most deplorable moral bent. Many witnesses present themselves, on the other hand, either to deny, or to explain, the arraignment, so cruelly magnified. Some, in a rather clumsy attempt to palliate a sadly disastrous course of life, have alleged a violent attachment blighted, an imperious need of forgetting, at all risks and at all costs, an incurable sorrow in which, they say, the poet would have foolishly made shipwreck of his life's peace and the honor of his memory. That there had been, in the youth of Musset, a page the recollection of which was never effaced, can hardly be questioned. The strange effusions, half romances half panegyrics—published under the several titles of "*Elle et Lui*," by Madame George Sand, "*Lui et Elle*," by Paul de Musset, and "*Lui*," by Madame Louise Collet, have given this adventure of two great minds setting at naught the restraints of society a celebrity so wide as to leave no room for any absolute

denial. Musset himself, in his "Confession d'un enfant du Siècle," which it would be a mistake to accept in its integrity as an autobiography, has painted woman with such bitterness, and deceit with such horror, that we can, and ought to, find in this admirable book, which appeared in 1836, the distinct echo of that famous sojourn in Italy, and of the time when Indiana and Rolla drank together from the cup of forbidden delights and of inevitable disenchantment.

But, I repeat, this unhappy passion, which wrung from the poet the violent objurgations of "La Nuit de Mai" and the "Lettre à Lamartine," was destined in a few years to witness the disappearance of the very last traces of its own first fervor. To say that Musset died in 1857 from the consequences of a despair which dated from 1836⁷ is nothing less than an insult to the reader's intelligence. How much more simple is it to admit that the poet's tenderness of heart, his abnormally excited sensibility, his mental energy strained to the utmost limit of its power, were necessarily to triumph over the frailty of a constitution ill-fitted by nature to withstand the shocks of so many emotions and so many struggles. To relegate to the ranks of the vulgar debauchees the author of

"l'Espoir en Dieu," "Rolla," and the "Nuits" is to violate the laws of plain good sense as well as those of common decency ; it is, in a word to calumniate Nature by admitting the possibility of her sending such a monster into the world ;—a soul possessed of infinite ideality, a body delighting only in the mire of the most abject vices.

Beloved poet ! How cruelly have they misunderstood you who, thinking to defend, have thus succeeded in darkening, your memory ! How much easier for them, how much more grateful to those who love you so dearly—and they are counted by millions in the smiling land of France—to seek, in the works that came all palpitating from the inmost recesses of your heart, the true key-note, the accurate repercussion, of your passionate desires ! They would there have found a portraiture of innocence, the work of a hand guided by the most touching veneration ; they would have been moved by the bitter, poignant lamentations of a soul widowed of faith, and inconsolable at the loss. How plainly could they have discerned, in these few volumes,—slender but precious legacy of genius—the living impress of the poet's innate love for all that is good, beautiful, and holy, in art, in thought, in humanity ! Of how slight import would

then have been the vague chatter of these gossips about the possible weaknesses of his life ! How contemptible, how vain, how criminal would it have appeared, brought face to face with the life-work so generously, so faithfully wrought by his resounding eloquence and unconquerable sincerity !

For this is what we must come to after all, whenever chance, taking pity on the dull actualities of our lives, brings us into the presence of one of those beings, anointed with holy oil, who speak to us still more as prophets than as poets. If they address us in a language which we feel to be the only true language ; if each word that falls from their lips sets the most secret fibre of our individuality trembling ; if the inspirations of their muse awake in us that something already seen, already lived, which is the common inheritance of all our brothers in adversity ; if, banishing Reason, that cold, stingy mistress, they dazzle our eyes with visions of supreme beauty and unspeakable delights ; if forgetfulness of the present, disdain of the future succeed, thanks to their magic incantation, the mortal cares of our petty daily contrivings ; if, in one word, they know how to prolong and to gild our dream—even should the illusion last but

one hour, the voluptuous trance end with the first stroke of the clock, an eternal despair follow these fleeting delights ;—if these be thy gifts, O Poet, blessed be thou ! Thy cool hand has been, for an instant, laid upon the burning temples of the fevered creature, and if faith has not been restored him—in this age of burials that know no resurrection—thou has snatched him, for one never-to-be forgotten instant, from the implacable brutality of facts, and moistened his dry lips at the sacred spring of the beautiful !

We shall, of course, be told of morality,—of that artificial association of ideas swaying to the wind of all the caprices of humanity,—a veritable spectrum of fallacious tints,—the shell of hypocrisy, the complaisant cloak of them whose god is Self, and their prophet “What will people say !” It has often been remarked that trades’ unions only result in the despotism of the mediocre workman over his more ingenious, more industrious, and more ambitious competitor. The tiresome cuckoo-cry, which to the imperious needs of an elect spirit incessantly opposes the precepts of a purely mechanical morality, has always seemed to us the exact counterpart of the constitution of the “Knights of Labor.” “Thus far shalt thou go, and no further,”

says the man of feeble ideas and narrow vision, the conservative of himself and his own special order of things,—“Outside of my conception of duty, of nature, and of God, there is no salvation! Ostracism to him who departs from it by one hair’s-breadth! I am the irresistible power of the overwhelming majority.”

And thus, wrapping himself in his impeccability, casting a satisfied glance at his own reflection in his own mirror—the reflection of an imaginary being—behold the “moral man,” crushing with his assumption of scorn the genius who goes his way, ignoring him. Death by stoning is not yet out of date, and the raileries, the insults, the calumnies are neither less heavy nor less murderous than the stones that crushed St. Stephen at Antioch. It is true that these victims rise from the grave and that their ultimate triumph is certain.

Matthew Arnold, some years ago, spoke of that handful of men, which, century after century, has constantly been recruited throughout the whole surface of the globe, and which jealously guards the torch of civilization from the attacks of the *vulgum pecus*. For them alone is life permanent, they alone triumph,

not in their own generation but in that land of promise which their eyes can descry upon the horizon,—posterity. To them belong all self-denial, all mercy, all charity, all grandeur of soul. They do not withhold from the poet, whose life is an agony—whom the “moral man” fears and keeps at a distance,—the sacrament of their love. Of the women of genius,—the Sapphos, the Eliots, the Sands,—they do not demand a recital of their hidden miseries; these women have sung their part in the splendid hymn of regeneration, have been the inspiring Muses, the consoling nurses, the Sisters of Charity, of saddened humanity.—Enter, sisters, into the Paradise of lofty souls! And ye, our sorely-tried brethren, who found nowhere but in the devastating tempests of your own sick hearts that repose for which those hearts felt such gnawing hunger; ye mighty and tender poets;—Byron, Heine, Musset, wondrous and touching triad who have lulled our generation to the searching measures of your song-stories, who have shown it Truth crushed beneath her new load of desolation, yet still glorious in her own incorruptible nakedness;—enter with lofty front, as ye were wont to walk on earth, into that supreme Walhalla where sit enthroned, in the majesty

of deified genius, Homer, and Shakespeare, and Rabelais, and Goethe, great sinners, without doubt,—great sinners, but, beyond all, and above all—*men*.

Whilst the pestilent dogmatic horde of the Philistines yet rage without ceasing against this exalted victim, there have been found, nevertheless, many men of intellect, some high-placed in the commonwealth of letters, to limn the portrait, more or less finished, but always piously sympathetic, of Alfred de Musset. The inimitable Sainte Beuve found, in his "*Causeries du Lundi*," in speaking of his illustrious friend, that inspiration which once prompted him to write, "There are, in every man, the ashes of a dead poet, whose survivor is the man." In his "*Souvenirs littéraires*," Maxime du Camp refused to indorse the opprobrious indictment put forward against the memory of Musset; while names less illustrious—Paul Foucher, Arsène Houssaye, Albéric Second, Claudin—did honor to their own reputation as men of feeling and as charming writers by their tender treatment of the departed poet.

Lastly, the "*Souvenirs de Madame Jau-
bert*," by letting us into the secret of one of the most delicate, of one of the most constant

attachments which ever existed between an ardently emotional man and an enthusiastically affectionate and chaste woman, have revealed to us a deeply touching page of this tormented life, rendered fragrant by the sweet presence of "the godmother."

For the path of Alfred de Musset was brightened by a woman of noblest character and loftiest intelligence, to whom it was given to conquer this ultra-nervous nature without the allurements of illicit love, and who became, throughout his whole life, the sister of his soul. Her playful gravity, the wisdom of her counsels, had won for her from her grown-up child the gracious appellation of "Godmother"; and, on more than one occasion, that soft hand succeeded in diverting from some regrettable folly him whom her light fancy named "her dear *Damis*." A sonnet published long after his death responds with loving reproach to some such effort, and pictures to us some of the poet's tenderness toward his gentle friend :

" . . Vous qui connaissez mon âme tout entière,
A qui je n'ai jamais rien tu, même un chagrin,
Est-ce à vous de me faire une telle injustice ?"

Had there been in his life no other besides this lovely and unique relation, what injustice

were it to speake of Musset as of some God-forsaken creature whose lyre answered only to the impulses of the foulest and most lascivious thoughts ! But one other love, equally puissant, whole, and imperishable, has made manifest to the eyes of the world the warmth of heart, the faithfulness of instinct, the lasting tenderness, which were of the essence of this noble nature. I am not speaking here of the long-enduring passion, so ill requited, of which George Sand was the object,—that bond, so shaken and tossed, of two ill-balanced existences,—but of the union, so intimate, so absolute, which lasted from the cradle to the grave, between Alfred and his brother Paul. An admirable work, the “*Biographie d’Alfred de Musset*,” is the monument erected to the memory of this irreplaceable affection, an affection of which Alfred wrote :

“ Je ne sais où va mon chemin,
Mais je marche mieux quand ta main
Serre la mienne.”

And the same hand, whilst drawing, in such minute detail, the picture of a too-short life, has painted us, in sober and well-chosen colors, one of the most exact and intense psychological studies of our times. Here are no striving after effect, no heavy and useless

German *excursus*, but a sequence of facts, almost bare of comment, which make their weight felt by sheer logical force. And if a brother's tenderness has shielded against an over-severe criticism the venial errors of the vanished poet, the proud love of truth which is characteristic of the Mussets breathes freely and fearlessly throughout the whole of this powerful volume.

Time, that flies so fast in this steam-century, has already given its full and favorable verdict for the author of the "Biographie," as it has accorded to Alfred de Musset his rightful place among the great names of our age. On the stage, the light, semi-dramatic studies which our poet always regarded rather as pastime than as serious work, those *proverbes*, *saynètes*, short pieces, so peculiar in coloring, and yet so exact in their philosophic deductions, have taken rank among the brightest jewels of the Comédie Française. The two volumes of poems are upon every table and in every heart, and preside over the development of innocent loves as they rule the fiery outbursts of riper passions. Here the heedless young student and the savant grown gray in learned vigils, find themselves participating in thoughts worthy of the one and the other, and if "Namouna,"

"Mardoche" and "Don Paez" offer no food for reflection of the abstract order, "Rolla," the "Espoir en Dieu," the "Souvenir des Alpes," more than one sonnet, at once dainty and profound, carry our minds away to the land of dreams not yet ended and beliefs not yet perfected.

Still other poems,—the "Ode à la Malibran," "Une bonne Fortune," *Le Rhin Allemand*,"—possess a swing, a swagger, an elegance of finish and force of sentiment that few French bards have ever equalled.

Thus, seizing the soul on all sides at once,—the tender, the sportive, the intellectual, sometimes the voluptuous, but only in its adorably melancholy key,—Musset has possessed the youth of France, and, if he has not been able to snatch it altogether from the putrescent influence of an all-pervading egotism, has, at least, opened for it a sunlit vista leading to the realms of the ideal.

These poems have never, in our opinion, received at the hands of English translators a treatment sufficiently favorable to enable those of our fellow-countrymen to whom the riches of the French language are as in a locked treasure-house to appreciate the extraordinary power exercised by Musset on his own times and his own people.

A few comedies alone—among which “The Caprice” holds the place of honor ;—a few cleverly written and quaintly colored tales, have, so far, in their English garb, given but a vague and indistinct conception of the great poet.

In publishing, therefore, the three novellettes and the short play which follow these somewhat disjointed remarks, the editor has been prompted by a sentiment of profound veneration for the memory of this great author, and ventures to hope that the glory of that memory shall have nothing to suffer from a tribute of so little value.

“ Je veux quand on m’a lu qu’on puisse me relire,”

wrote the master in his closing sonnet.

The editor of this tiny volume can wish his indulgent reader no higher enjoyment than to re-read, one day, Musset’s every line in the language he himself loved so well.

E. DE V. VERMONT.

NEW YORK, 1st November, 1888.



MARGOT.



MARGOT.

IN a large gothic house of the Rue du Perche, in the Marais quarter of Paris, lived, in 1804, an old lady, well known and beloved in all that neighborhood. She was called Madame Doradour. She was a woman of the olden time, belonging, not to the court, but to the good "bourgeoisie"; rich, devout, cheerful and charitable. She led a very retired life; her only occupation being to distribute alms, and to play "Boston" with her neighbors. She dined at two o'clock, and supped at nine. She hardly ever went out except to go to church and take an occasional short walk around the Place Royale as she came back. In a word, she had preserved the customs, and almost the dress, of her time, caring but little for the present, reading her prayer-book rather than the newspapers, leaving the world to go its way, and thinking only of dying in peace.

As she was fond of talk, and even, perhaps, a little garrulous, she had always kept

with her, during twenty years of widowhood, a lady companion. That lady—or rather old maid—who never left her, had soon grown to be a friend. The two were always together, at mass, on the promenade, at the fireside. Mademoiselle Ursule kept the keys of the cellar, of the linen presses, even of the bureau. She was a tall, dried-up maiden, of a masculine appearance, speaking with the tip of her tongue, very imperious and somewhat ill-tempered. Madame Doradour—quite a little body—would, as she prattled along, hang on to the arm of the ugly creature, calling her “my good one,” and allowing herself to be kept, as it were, in leading-strings. She blindly confided in her favorite, and had even written her down in her will for a large amount. Mademoiselle Ursule, mindful of this, professed to love her mistress better than herself; and never spoke of her without looking heavenwards with sighs of gratitude.

It goes without saying that Mademoiselle Ursule was the real mistress of that house. Whilst Madame Doradour, ensconced on her lounge in a corner of the drawing-room, was busy with her knitting, Mademoiselle Ursule, the keys at her side, would parade majestically through the rooms, bang the doors, pay the tradesmen, and cause the ser-

vants to execrate her under their breath. But as soon as the dinner hour struck, or when company came in, she would make her appearance with due timidity, clad in a dark, unassuming dress. She bowed down with compunction, knew how to keep herself at the proper distance, and how to make a show of abdication. At church no one prayed more devoutly or cast down the eyes lower than she ; if Madame Doradour, whose piety was sincere, happened to take a nap in the middle of the sermon, Mademoiselle Ursule would touch her elbow,—and the preacher felt quite pleased. Madame Doradour had tenants, lawyers, farmers : Mademoiselle Ursule audited the accounts, and in every law-squabble showed herself incomparable. There was not, thanks to her, a speck of dust throughout the whole house ; all was clean, neat, scoured, brushed, the furniture in perfect order, the linen snow-white, the china like a mirror, the clocks regulated. Our housekeeper needed all this so that she could scold at her ease and reign in all her glory.

To speak the truth, Madame Doradour was not blind to the defects of her “good friend,” but never, in all her life, had she realized aught but the good in this world. Evil never

seemed quite clear to her : she endured without understanding it. Moreover, habit had full sway over the old dame. Had she not, for twenty years, leaned on Mademoiselle Ursule's arm, and had they not, for just as long a period, taken their morning coffee together. When her *protégée* screamed too loudly, Madame Doradour stopped her knitting, raised her head, and asked, in her little flute-like voice, "What is the matter, my good one?" But the "good one" did not always deign to answer, or, if she entered into explanation, she managed it in such a way that Madame Doradour, very soon resuming her knitting, hummed a little tune so as to hear no more.

All of a sudden it was discovered, after such a long period of confidence, that Mademoiselle Ursule was deceiving everybody ; her mistress to begin with. Not only did she make an income out of the expenses of the house, but, anticipating the will, she appropriated to herself clothes, linen, and even jewelry. As impunity emboldens, she went so far as to steal a diamond casket, of which, it is true, Madame Doradour did not make any use, but which, since time immemorial, she had preserved, with respect, in her drawer, as a souvenir of her lost charms. Madame Do-

radour refused to give up to the courts a woman she loved so well ; she simply sent her away from the house, refusing to see her a last time ; and then she found herself suddenly in so cruel a solitude, that she shed the bitterest tears. In spite of her piety she could not help bemoaning the instability of earthly things, and the pitiless caprices of fate, which does not respect even an old and kindly deception.

One of her good neighbors, Mr. Després, having come to console her, she asked his advice :

“ What will become of me now ? ” said she to him. “ I cannot live alone ; where shall I find a new friend ? The one I have just lost was so dear to me, and I was so well accustomed to her, that in spite of the sad way in which she has rewarded my affections, I am actually regretting her departure. Who will answer for the next one ? What confidence shall I be able to place in an entire stranger ? ”

“ The misfortune from which you suffer,” answered Mr. Després, “ would be very deplorable if it caused a soul like yours to doubt virtue. There are, in this world, some wretches and a great many hypocrites, but there are also honest people. Take another

lady companion, not choosing her lightly, nor being influenced by too many scruples. Your confidence has been deceived once ; that is just the reason why it should not be deceived a second time."

"I believe that you are right," replied Madame Doradour ; "but I am very sad and much embarrassed. I know so few people in Paris. Could you not render me the service of looking up references, and of finding for me an honest girl, who would be well treated here, and could, at least, lend me her arm to go to St. François d'Assise ?"

Mr. Després, being also a denizen of the Marais, was neither very quick, nor widely acquainted. He began his quest, however, and, a few days later, Madame Doradour had a new companion, to whom, at the end of two months, she had given all her love ; for she was as fickle as she was good. But it took her hardly three months more to send away the new-comer ; not as dishonest, but as little honest. Here was a second cause of grief for Madame Doradour. She desired to make a new choice, applied to all her neighbors, even answered advertisements—and found herself no more fortunate. Discouragement overwhelmed her. One saw then the good lady, leaning on her cane,

going to church all alone : she had resolved, that she would finish her days without the help of any one, and she tried, in public, to carry cheerfully her sadness and her years. But her limbs trembled as she went up the staircase, - for she was seventy years old ; and you could have found her in the evening, near the fire, her hands folded, and her head bent down. She could not endure solitude ; her health, already weak, showed a marked change ; little by little she fell into deep melancholy.

She had an only son, named Gaston, who had early embraced the profession of arms, and who was at that time garrisoned somewhere. She wrote to him concerning her trouble, and begged him to come to her help in her great wearisomeness. Gaston tenderly loved his mother ; he asked for a furlough and obtained it ; but the place of his garrison was, unhappily, the city of Strasbourg, where are found, as everybody knows, a great abundance of the prettiest grisettes of France. It is there only that one admires those German brunettes, in whom the Saxon languor is blended with a French vivacity. Gaston was in the good graces of two pretty tobacconists, who refused to let him go ; he vainly attempted to persuade them, even

showed them his mother's letter ; but they gave him so many bad reasons that he allowed himself to be convinced, and delayed his departure from day to day.

In the mean time, poor Madame Doradour fell seriously ill. She was born so merry, and grief was so unnatural to her, that it turned into a disease. The doctor did not know what to do. "Leave me," she said, "I want to die alone. Since all I loved have abandoned me, why should I wish to retain a remnant of life for which no one cares ?"

The deepest sadness reigned through the house, and, at the same time, the most pitiful disorder. The servants, seeing their mistress at the point of death, and knowing her will to be made, began to neglect her. Dust invaded the rooms, once so well kept, and covered the furniture, once so neatly arranged. "O my dear Ursule," cried out Madame Doradour, "my good one, where are you, to drive these wretches away ?"

One day when she was at her worst, her people saw her, with astonishment, sit up suddenly in bed, throw open the curtains, and put on her spectacles. She held in her hands a letter just brought in, and which she unfolded with the greatest care. At the top

of the sheet there was a beautiful engraving, representing the Temple of Friendship, with an altar in the middle and two burning hearts on the altar. The letter was written in a big childish hand, the words in perfectly straight lines, with fine flourishes all around the capital letters. It was a New Year's compliment, and was indicted somewhat in this fashion :

“MADAME AND DEAR GODMOTHER : ”

“It is to wish you a good and happy year that I take the pen for all the family, being the only one of us who can write. Papa, mamma and my brothers wish you the same. We have learned that you are ill and we pray God that He may preserve you, as He will certainly do. I take the liberty of sending with this some preserves, and I am with much respect and attachment,

Your goddaughter and servant,
MARGUERITE PIÉDELEU.”

Having read this letter, Madame Doradour put it under her pillow. She had Mr. Després call at once, and dictated her answer to him. No one in the house was told anything about it, but, as soon as the answer was gone, the sick lady appeared more quiet, and, a few days later, you would have found her as cheerful and as well as ever.

II.

The goodman Piédeleu was from the province of Beauce ; there he had spent his life, and there he fully intended to die. He was the old and honest farmer of the estate of la Honville, near Chartres, an estate belonging to Madame Doradour. He never in his life had seen either a forest or a mountain, having left his farm only to visit the neighboring city ; and Beauce, as every one knows, is but one immense plain. It is true that he had seen a river, the Eure, which flowed near his house. As for the sea, he believed in it as he did in Paradise,—that is to say, he thought one must first go and see it. Thus did he find in this world but three things worthy of admiration : the Cathedral-steeple at Chartres, a handsome girl, and a fine wheat-field. His erudition consisted simply in knowing that it is warm in summer, cold in winter, and that the market-price of grain is subject to fluctuation. But when, in the midday sun, at the hour when the husbandmen take their rest, the worthy farmer left his broad farm-yard to speak a few kind words to his crops, it was a great treat to see his massive form stand out against the horizon. It seemed

then that the blades of wheat stood up straighter and prouder than before, that the ploughshares shone more brilliantly. At his coming, the farm boys, stretched in the shade eating their dinner, uncovered their heads respectfully whilst biting into the broad slices of bread and cheese ; the oxen ruminated in a good-humored way ; the horses pranced under the hand of the master patting their rounded flanks. " Our country is the granary of France," the goodman often said ; then he lowered his head, marching, looked at his straight-cut furrows, and lost himself in contemplation.

Mistress Piédeleu, his wife, had given him nine children, of whom eight were boys, and, if each of the eight were not six feet high, he lacked but little of it. It is true that such was the size of the goodman, and the mother was five feet five inches : she was the handsomest woman thereabouts. The eight boys, strong as bullocks, the terror and admiration of the village, obeyed their father as slaves. They were, so to speak, the first and most zealous of his servants, doing in turn the work of carters, ploughmen, threshers. It was a fine sight to see those eight sturdy fellows, either when, with sleeves tucked up, the two-pronged

forks in their hands, they would build up a haystack, or, when marching to mass on Sunday, arm-in-arm, the father heading the procession ; or finally, when at night-fall, the work done, they sat around the long kitchen table exchanging remarks over their smoking soup and merrily touching their big tin cups.

In the midst of that family of giants had come into the world a small creature, full of health, but quite petite. It was the ninth child of Mistress Piédeleu, Marguerite, whom they called Margot. Her head hardly reached the elbow of any one of her brothers, and when her father wanted to kiss her he never failed to lift her from the ground and place her on the table. Little Margot was hardly sixteen ; her turned-up nose, her well-cut mouth, neatly filled and always smiling, the sun-warmed hue of her complexion, her chubby arms and her delicately rounded figure, gave her the look of cheerfulness itself ; in truth she was the joy of the family. Seated among her brothers, she shone and pleased the sight as a blue-bell in the midst of a bouquet of wheat-ears. " My faith," the goodman would say, " I don't know how my wife managed to get me that child ; she is a real gift of Providence ; all the same,

that little bit of a girl will make me laugh all my life."

Already Margot managed the household ; Mother Piédeleu, though still quite hale and hearty, had confided those duties to her, so as to accustom her early to order and economy. Margot arranged and locked up the linen and the wine, and had the care of the pots and pans, which, however, she did not deign to wash ; but she laid the covers, poured the drink, and sang a song when asked. The maid-servants of the house never spoke of her but as Mademoiselle Marguerite, for she had her little proud ways. Moreover, as people say, she was as good as a picture. I do not mean that she was not coquettish ; she was young, pretty, and a daughter of Eve. But woe to the boy, were he one of the village cocks, that would have dared to press her waist too hard ; it would have fared ill with him : the son of a farmer, named Jerry,—a bad case they called him,—having kissed her one day at the dance, had been rewarded with a sounding slap.

His Reverence the "Curé" showed Margot a marked esteem. When he had an example to quote, he always chose her. He even did her the honor to mention her name in the sermon, pointing her out as a model to his

flock. If the so-called progressive enlightenment of the Nineteenth Century had not suppressed the *rosières*—that old and honest custom of our ancestors,—Margot would have worn the garland of white roses, and that alone would have been worth a dozen sermons ; but our gentlemen of '89 have suppressed that with the rest. Margot knew how to sew, and even to embroider ; her father wished her, besides, to learn how to read and write, and she had also been taught spelling, a little grammar, and some geography. A Carmelite nun had had charge of her education. So Margot had become the oracle of the place ; as soon as she opened her mouth the peasants would gape. She told them that the earth was round, and they took her word for it. They gathered about her on Sundays, when she danced on the green ; for she had had a dancing-master, and her *pas de bourrée* threw every one in ecstasies. In a word, she managed to be beloved and admired at the same time,—a difficult feat indeed.

The reader knows already that Margot was the god-daughter of Madame Doradour, and that she herself had written that New Year's compliment on paper with a fine engraved heading. The letter—not ten lines in all—

had cost the little farmer-girl many thoughts and much trouble, for she was not very strong in literature. For all that, Madame Doradour, who always had liked Margot very much, and knew her for the best girl in the country, had decided to ask her of her father, and to make of her, if she were allowed, her lady companion.

The goodman was standing in his yard one evening, looking attentively at a new wheel just attached to one of his carts. Mother Piédeleu, under the shed, was gravely holding the nostrils of a skittish bull by means of an enormous pair of pincers, to prevent his moving while the veterinary surgeon inspected him. The farm-boys were grooming the horses, just back from the watering trough. The cattle slowly entered the yard, a majestic procession of cows filing towards the stable under the rays of the setting sun, and Margot, seated on a heap of clover, was reading an old copy of the "*Journal de l'Empire*" that His Reverence had lent her. His Reverence himself appeared at that moment, and coming to the good man, placed in his hands a letter from Madame Doradour. The farmer opened the letter with all due respect, but hardly had he read the first lines when he was obliged to

1944

RECEIVED BY THE DIRECTOR

OF THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

WASHINGTON, D. C.

TO THE DIRECTOR

FROM THE SAC, NEW YORK

RE: [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Very truly yours,

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

service when she had only to choose among the handsomest boys in the country to become a rich farmer's wife. The Piédeleu boys, for the first time in their lives, could not agree ; they would quarrel all day long,—some consenting, others refusing ; in a word, there was unheard-of disorder and incredible grief in that house. But the goodman remembered that in an unlucky year, Madame Doradour, instead of asking for her quarter's rent, had sent him a bag of money ; so he ordered silence all around, and decided that his daughter should go.

The day of departure arrived, and a horse was hitched to the wagon to carry Margot to Chartres. Nobody went to the fields that day ; nearly the whole village was collected in the farmyard. They had made a complete outfit for Margot ; the inside, and the outside, and the top of the wagon were covered with trunks and boxes ; the Piédeleus were determined that their girl should not cut a bad figure in Paris. Margot had said good-bye to everybody, and was about kissing her father, when His Reverence took her by the hand and addressed to her a fatherly speech about her voyage, the life she was about to enter, and the dangers that might assail her. "Preserve your modesty, maiden," finished

the worthy man, "it is the most precious of treasures ; watch over it ; God will do the rest."

Goodman Piédeleu was moved to tears, although he had not very clearly understood the whole of His Reverence's speech. He pressed his daughter to his heart, kissed her, and let her go ; then came back to her, and kissed her again ; he tried to speak, but his grief prevented him. "Remember His Reverence's advice," said he at last, in an altered voice. "Remember it well, my poor child." Then he added suddenly, "A thousand devils' pipes ! don't you forget it, and don't fail to—"

His Reverence, who was stretching his hands to give Margot his benediction, stopped short at this rough speech. But the goodman had spoken so strongly only to hide his emotion ; so he turned his back to His Reverence, and went into the house without a word. Margot climbed into the wagon, and the horse was about starting, when they heard such a big sob that everybody turned around. They saw then a little boy of fourteen years or thereabouts, whom nobody had noticed before.

His name was Pierrot, and his profession was not exactly noble, for he was a turkey-

keeper ; but he was passionately devoted to Margot, not from love, but from friendship. Margot always liked the poor little chap ; she often had given him a handful of cherries or a bunch of grapes with which to season his dry bread. As he was not wanting in intelligence, she had enjoyed hearing him talk, had taught him the little she knew, and, as they were both nearly of the same age, it had often happened when the lesson was finished, that teacher and pupil had played hide-and-go-seek together. At this very moment Pierrot wore a pair of wooden shoes Margot had given him in pity, seeing him barefooted. Standing alone in the corner of the yard, surrounded by his humble flock, Pierrot looked at his wooden shoes, and cried with all his heart.

Margot beckoned him to approach, and stretched out her hand ; he took it and brought it to his face, as if he wished to kiss it, but it only touched his eyes ; when Margot withdrew it it was all wet with tears. She said a last good-bye to her mother, and the wagon started.

III.

When Margot climbed into the stage-coach at Chartres, the idea of travelling twenty leagues, and of seeing Paris, had already upset her to such an extent that she had lost all desire for food or drink. Much saddened as she was at leaving her native village, she could not help but feel some curiosity, as she had so often heard Paris spoken of as the marvel of marvels ; hardly could she imagine that she was going to see such a beautiful city with her own eyes. Among her stage companions was a travelling clerk, who, faithful to the habits of his profession, ceased not to prattle all the time. Margot listened to his "fairly tales" with a religious attention. A few of her timid questions soon showed him how much of a novice she was, and, piling up his exaggerations, he drew such an extravagant and pompous picture of the capital that, listening to him, it would have been difficult to find out whether he was speaking of Paris or Pekin. Of course Margot had no idea of doubting him, and he was not the man to stop at the thought that her first step in the great city would show her how much he had lied. This is indeed the supreme attraction of boasting. I remember

that once, while going to Italy, I was treated just as Margot was : one of my travelling companions gave me a description of Genoa, the very place I was about to visit ; he was lying on the steamer that brought us there ; he was lying in sight of the city ; in the harbor he was lying still.

The stages coming from Chartres enter Paris through the Champs Elysées. I leave you to imagine what must have been the feelings of admiration of a peasant girl from Beauce whilst descending that magnificent avenue, without its peer in the world and which seems built to welcome a triumphant hero, master of the rest of the universe. After such splendor the quiet and narrow streets of the Marais seemed very dreary to Margot. Nevertheless, when the coach stopped before the gate of Madame Doradour, the fine appearance of the house charmed her. She raised the knocker with a trembling hand, and let it fall with mingled fear and pleasure. Madame Doradour expected her god-daughter, received her with outstretched arms, and giving her a thousand caresses, called her "her own little girl," ensconced her on a low sofa, and had some supper brought to her.

All dizzy from the noise of the streets,

Margot looked at the tapestries, at the painted panels, at the gilded furniture, but above all she looked into the beautiful mirrors decorating the drawing-room. She had never done her hair up before anything larger than her father's shaving-glass; judge how charming and how astonishing it must have been to see her image reflected around her in so many different manners. The delicate and polished tones of her godmother, her noble and reserved way of speaking, also impressed her deeply. Even the dress of the good lady, her ample robe of heavy flowered silk, her large cap and powdered hair, were matter of reflection for Margot, and revealed to her at once that she was in the presence of a superior being. As she had a quick and facile mind, and, at the same time, that instinct of imitation so natural to children, she had chattered hardly an hour with Madame Doradour before she was trying to imitate her ways. She sat up, straightened her cap, and called to her help all the grammar she knew. Unfortunately, a glass of very good wine, offered by her godmother to help her recuperate, had strangely confused her ideas. Her eyelids fell; so Madame Doradour took her by the hand, led her into a beautiful chamber, where, after having kissed her anew,

she wished her a very good night and retired.

A minute later some one knocked at the door ; a lady's maid entered, took off Margot's shawl and cap, and leaned down to untie her shoes. Margot, already asleep, though standing, let her do as she pleased. It was only when her last garment came off that she noticed that she was being undressed ; but, without realizing her singular attire, she made a deep bow to the *femme de chambre*, said her prayers in quite a hurry, and slid quickly into bed. By the flickering light of her night-lamp she half noticed that her chamber also had some gilt furniture, and that it was adorned with one of those magnificent mirrors she loved so well. Above the fine pane of glass a sculptured panel, all wreathed and surrounded with little cupids, seemed to call her to see the reflection of her image. She promised herself to answer the appeal, and rocked, as it were, by the pleasantest dreams, she fell asleep in a delightful mood.

People get up early in the country. Our little village maiden woke up the next morning with the birds. She sat up in bed, and perceiving in her beloved mirror a bright face, honored it with her most winning smile.

Soon the *femme de chambre* appeared, asking respectfully if mademoiselle wished to take a bath. At the same time she placed upon her shoulders a robe of scarlet flannel that seemed to Margot nothing less than kingly purple.

The bath-room of Madame Doradour was a more worldly retreat than seemed proper for such a devout person. It had been built under King Louis XV. The bath-tub, approached by three steps, was placed in a stuccoed recess, framed in with gilt roses, with the unavoidable cupids pursuing their flight all over the ceiling. On a panel opposite was painted a copy of "The Bathers" by Boucher—a copy due perhaps to Boucher himself. A garland of flowers ran along the wood-work; a thick carpet covered the floor, and a silken curtain, gracefully looped, allowed a mysterious *chiar' oscuro* to penetrate through the lattice. Time, of course, had dimmed all this magnificence, and the gildings showed traces of age. But that very softening made one feel more at ease, as if inhaling a perfumed whiff from the sixty years of folly,—the reign of the beloved king.

Margot, alone in this room, approached the steps timidly. First she examined the gilt griffins encased on each side of the bath. She hardly dared to enter the water, which

seemed to be at least attar of roses. She cautiously dipped one limb into the water, then the other, then remained standing in contemplation before the panel. She did not know much about paintings, so that she doubtless saw goddesses in the nymphs of Boucher. Never could she imagine that such women existed on earth, that such white hands could help one to eat, that such small feet could walk and run. What would she not have given to be as lovely as they ! She never guessed that, with her sun-browned hands, she was worth a hundred such dolls. A slight movement of the curtain drew her suddenly from her abstraction ; she shuddered at the idea of being caught thus, and sank into the water up to her neck.

A feeling of ease and languor soon pervaded her entire being ; she began, as all children do, by playing in the water with the corner of her wrapper. Then she amused herself counting the flowers and the sculptures of the room ; she also examined the small cupids, but their rotundity displeased her. She leaned her head on the rim of the bath-tub, and looked out through the slightly opened window.

The bathing-room was on the ground floor, and the window looked into the garden. It

was not, as one may think, an English garden, but an old-fashioned garden in the French style,—a very lovely style to my mind : fine gravelled walks, with borders of boxwood, large flower-beds, brilliant with well-combined colors ; here and there pretty statuary, and, far off, a labyrinth of shrubs. Margot looked at the labyrinth, the dark entrance of which put her in a dreamy mood ; the hide-and-go-seek games came back to her, and she thought that, amongst the meanders of the shrubbery, there must be plenty of good hiding-places.

At that very moment a handsome young man, in the uniform of a huzzar, came out of the labyrinth, walking toward the house. Having passed near the flower-bed he approached so close to the window of the bathing-room that his elbow actually touched the latticework. Margot could not repress a slight exclamation called forth by her fright ; the young man stopped, lifted the latticework, and put in his head ; he saw Margot in her bath, and, although a huzzar, he blushed. Margot blushed also, and the young man walked away.

IV.

The most unfortunate thing under the sun for everybody, especially for young girls, is that to be good is a hard task, and that to be simply reasonable we have to take a world of trouble ; while to be naughty there is nothing to do but to let go. Homer tells us that Sisyphus was the wisest of mortals ; nevertheless the poets unanimously condemn him to roll an enormous stone up the slope of a hill, whence it falls back at once on the poor man, who recommences rolling it up again. Commentators have wearied themselves searching for the reason of that torture : as for me, I have never doubted that, by means of this beautiful allegory, the ancients wished to represent the pursuit of goodness. Is not goodness, in fact, that enormous rock, which we roll up without ceasing, and which falls back just as often on our heads ? The joke is that, the day the stone escapes our hands, our having rolled it up for so many years avails us nothing ; while, on the contrary, if a fool happens by chance to perform a single reasonable act, no praise is too extravagant for him. Folly is very far from being a stone ; it is a soap-bubble which goes dancing before us, reflecting, like the rainbow, all

the colors of creation. It is true that the bubble bursts, and scatters a few drops of water in our eyes, but a new bubble at once comes to life, and to keep it up in the air all we need do is to breathe.

By these philosophical reflections I desire to show that it is not surprising that Margot should be just a little in love with the gentleman who had glanced at her in her bath, and I also wish to say that on this account the reader must not form a bad opinion of her. When Love gets mixed up in our affairs he needs no help from any one, and it is well known that to close the door in his face is not the means to prevent his entering; but this time he entered through the window, and here comes the whole story.

The young fellow in the huzzar uniform was none other than Gaston, the son of Madame Doradour, who had torn himself away from his garrison flirtations, and had just reached his mother's house. Heaven willed that the room awarded to Margot should be the one at the corner of the house, and that the room of the young man should be in that neighborhood; that is, their two windows were nearly opposite, and, at the same time, quite near each other. Margot used to dine with Madame Doradour, and to

pass the afternoon with her until supper-time ; but from seven o'clock in the morning until noon she remained in her room. At that time Gaston was in his room, also, so that Margot had nothing to do but to sew near the window and look across towards her neighbor.

Neighborhood has, in all times, been the cause of the greatest misadventures ; there is nothing so dangerous as a pretty neighbor ; were she plain, even, I should hardly feel secure, for, by dint of seeing her all the time, I should be bound, sooner or later, to think her pretty. Gaston had a little round mirror hanging at the window, as is the custom of bachelors. Before that mirror he would shave himself, comb his hair, and tie his cravat. Margot noticed that he had fine blond hair, which curled naturally. That induced her to buy at once a bottle of violet-scented hair-oil, which helped her to keep the two little waves emerging from under her cap always smooth and brilliant. She noticed, also, that Gaston brought out a number of pretty cravats ; so she bought a dozen silk kerchiefs, the prettiest that were to be had in the whole Marais. Besides, Gaston indulged in that habit which made the great Geneva philosopher so indignant,

and which caused his estrangement from his friend Grimm : he pared his nails, as Rousseau says, " with an instrument made on purpose." Margot was not so great a philosopher as Rousseau ; instead of getting indignant, she bought a nail-brush, and to hide her hand—which was a trifle red, as I said before—she put on black mitts, showing but the tips of her fingers. Gaston had many other fine things which Margot could not imitate ; for example, red trousers, and a sky-blue spencer all braided with black. Margot owned, it is true, a wrapper of scarlet flannel, but what could offset the blue spencer ? She pretended to have the ear-ache, and made herself, for morning wear, a small *toque* of blue velvet. Having noticed at the head of Gaston's bed a portrait of Napoleon, she wanted to have that of Joséphine. Finally, Gaston having said one day, at breakfast, that he rather liked a good omelet, Margot surmounted her timidity, and performed an act of great courage : she declared that no one knew how to make omelets so well as she ; that at home she always prepared them herself, and that her godmother ought kindly to taste one from her hand.

Thus did the poor child endeavor to show

her virginal love, but Gaston did not pay the slightest attention to it. How could a bold and proud young man, accustomed to the noisy pleasures of garrison life, have noticed all this childish intriguing? The grisettes of Strasbourg manage it differently, when a caprice enters their heads. Gaston usually dined with his mother, then went out for the whole evening; and, as Margot could not sleep until he was back, she awaited him behind her curtain. It sometimes happened that the young man, seeing a light in her room, would say, as he crossed the yard, "Why has not that little girl gone to bed?" It also happened that, whilst finishing his toilet, he would give Margot an absent-minded look which went to her soul; but she turned her head the other way at once, for she would rather have died than to return such a look. It is true that, in the drawing-room, she did not show herself the same. Sitting by her godmother, she endeavored to appear grave and reserved, and to listen demurely to the prattle of Madame Doradour. When Gaston spoke to her, she would answer as best she could, and strange to say, she would feel no emotion whatever. Explain who can what passed through that fifteen-year-old brain; the love of Margot

was, so to speak, locked up in her room ; she found it there when she entered, and left it as she came out ; but she took the key with her, so that no one could, in her absence, profane her little sanctuary.

It is easy to understand that the presence of Madame Doradour caused her to be circumspect, and led to many a reflection. Did not that presence constantly remind her of the distance between her and Gaston ? Another girl would probably have felt desperate or resolved to get cured at any cost, feeling the danger of such a passion. But Margot had never asked herself, even in her inmost heart, what would be the outcome of such love ; and, in truth, is there a more empty question than that continually addressed to lovers, "Where will that lead you ?" Ay, my good people, that will lead me to love !

As soon as Margot would wake up, she jumped from her bed and ran barefoot, in her neat little night-cap, to lift a tiny corner of the curtain and to see if Gaston had opened his shutters. If these were closed, she would return quickly to bed, watching the moment when she could hear the noise of the window-knob, so familiar to her. That moment come, she put on her slippers and

her dressing-gown, opened her window as he had opened his, and leaned over, nodding her head with a sleepy air as if to ascertain what kind of weather there was ; then she pushed open one of the sashes of the window, so as to be seen by Gaston only ; then she placed her looking-glass on a small table, and began to comb her beautiful hair. She did not know that a true coquette shows herself when adorned, not whilst adorning her person : as Gaston arranged his hair before her she arranged hers before him. Half-hidden by the mirror, she risked some timid glances, quick to lower her eyes if Gaston happened to look at her. When her hair was nicely combed and puffed up, she placed on top the little cap of embroidered mull *à la paysanne*, she had steadily refused to give up ; that little cap was always pure white, as was also the broad turned-down collar encasing her shoulders and making her look like a little nun. She remained thus with bare arms and a short petticoat, waiting for her coffee. Soon Mademoiselle Pélagie, her *femme de chambre*, appeared, bearing a tray, and escorted by the house cat,—an indispensable piece of furniture at the Marais—which never failed every morning to pay his respects to Margot. He enjoyed the privilege of occupying a low sofa

just in front of her, and of having his share of the breakfast. Of course the whole thing was to the young girl but a pretext for renewed coquetry. The cat, old and spoiled, rolled in a ball in an arm-chair, gravely received kisses which were not meant for him. Margot would tease him, take him in her arms, throw him upon the bed, now caressing, now vexing him. For the ten years he had lived in the house, he had never been made so much of, and if he did not exactly enjoy it, he took it all the same in good part, being at bottom a good-natured cat, with quite a liking for Margot. The coffee drunk, she would again approach the window, pretending to look after the weather, then pushing the sash open, she admitted more light into the room. Now, a man with a hunter's instinct would have found it the proper time for lying in wait. Margot was just finishing her toilet. Shall I say that she showed herself? Oh, no! she nearly died with fear of being seen and with desire to be seen. But was not Margot a good girl? Certainly she was; a good, honest and innocent child. Then what did she do? O, she simply tied her shoes, put on her skirt and dress, and from time to time, through the half-open window, one might have seen her stretching her

arm to take a pin from the table. But what would she have done had she been watched ? Undoubtedly she would have closed the window. Then why did she leave it open ? O, you just ask her ; I do not know.

Matters had reached that point, when one day Madame Doradour and her son began to hold long *tête-à-têtes*. There reigned about them an atmosphere of mystery, and they often spoke in covert terms. A short time afterwards Madame Doradour said to Margot, " My dear child, you will soon see your mother again ; we shall pass the autumn at la Honville."

V.

The Honville habitation was situated about a league from Chartres ; half that distance from the farm where Margot's parents lived. It could hardly be called a " castle," but it was certainly a beautiful house with a large park attached. Madame Doradour seldom visited her estate, and its only inhabitant for many years had been her head-overseer. All the more surprised and disturbed was Margot at this sudden excursion and at the mysterious interviews between the old lady and her son.

Madame Doradour had arrived but two

days before, and all the luggage had not been unpacked even, when there appeared on the plain ten giants marching in battle array. It was the Piédeleu family coming to pay their regards. The mother carried a basket of fruit, the sons presented each a pot of gilliflowers, and the goodman ambled along with an enormous melon under each arm ; he had chosen them himself as the best of his crop. Madame Doradour received these presents with her usual kindness, and—as she had anticipated her farmer's visit—she extracted from her press eight waistcoats of flowered silk for the boys, a piece of lace for Mother Piédeleu, and for the goodman a broad-brimmed felt hat with a gold buckle. The compliments having thus been offered and returned, Margot, radiant with joy and health, appeared before her people. After she had been kissed all around, her godmother began to praise her aloud, speaking highly of her mildness, her modesty, her brightness ; and the cheeks of the young girl, warmly colored from the kisses received, blushed a vivid red. Mother Piédeleu, judging from the fine clothes of Margot that she must be happy, could not help, good mother as she was, saying that she had never been prettier. “ My faith, that's true,” said the goodman. “ True

indeed," repeated a voice that made Margot's heart jump. The speaker was Gaston, who had just entered.

At that moment, the door being left open, they noticed, in the antechamber, little Pierrot, the turkey-keeper, who had cried so hard on Margot's departure. He had followed his masters some distance away, and not daring to enter the room, he attempted, from afar, an awkward bow. "Who is this little fellow?" asked Madame Doradour. "Come nearer, my boy; come and say good-morning." Pierrot bowed again, but nothing could induce him to come in; he colored as red as fire and took to his heels in fear and trembling.

"Is it really true that you find me pretty?" repeated Margot to herself, as she walked all alone in the park, after her family had gone. "How bold men are, to say such things before so many people. I dare not even look in his face; how can he speak aloud words that make me blush so deeply? He must be very much accustomed to it indeed, or look upon the thing as very insignificant. All the same, to say to a woman that you find her pretty, is a great deal; almost a declaration of love."

At such a thought Margot stopped and began asking herself whether she knew anything about declarations of love. She had heard a good deal on the subject, but still she did not understand the matter very clearly. "How do people say that they love?" she asked herself, and she could hardly believe that the words "I love you" could be all sufficient. It seemed that there should be something else, something more, a secret,—a special language, as it were,—a mystery full of danger and delight. She had read but one novel, the title of which I do not remember. It was an odd volume found by chance in her father's store-room. It told of a Sicilian brigand running away with a nun, and it contained some unintelligible sentences that she judged to be love phrases; but she had heard His Reverence say that novels were all silly stuff, and to-day she craved for truth, not nonsense. From whom would she dare ask it?

Gaston's room, at La Honville, was not as near Margot's as it was in Paris. No more furtive glances, no more windows opening with a clang. Every morning, at five o'clock, a bell sounded discreetly. It was the game-keeper awakening Gaston, the bell hanging outside quite close to his quarters. Then

the young man got up, and went out shooting. Behind her latticed shutters, Margot could see him, gun in hand, surrounded by his pointers, when he started on horseback, through the mist which still veiled the fields. Her eyes followed him with the same emotion she would have felt had she been a tower-bound, mediæval lady whose lover had started for Palestine. It often happened that Gaston, instead of ordering the inner gate to be opened, would make his horse jump that slight obstacle. Then how Margot did utter a frightened sigh, half sweet, half sad ! And when Gaston returned at night, all dust covered, how she looked at him from head to foot, to assure herself that he had come back safe and sound, as from a bloody strife ! When he drew from his game-bag a hare or a brace of partridges and placed them on the table, she thought she saw a victorious warrior bringing home his enemy's spoils.

What she so much dreaded happened one day. Gaston, clearing a hedge, fell from his horse into some bramble-bushes, and was slightly scratched. How upset she was by such a trivial accident ! Her prudence deserted her ; she came near fainting away. Her hands crossed themselves nervously and

she could have been heard muttering a low prayer. How delighted she would have been, had she herself been allowed to stop the few drops of blood flowing from the young man's wounded hand ! She placed in her pocket her finest handkerchief—her only embroidered one—ardently hoping for an occasion to present it to Gaston to wrap in it his scratched palm. But even that consolation was denied her. At supper, that evening, the cruel boy refused Margot's offer to wipe off the few drops of blood escaping from the ill-arranged bandage, and he negligently rolled a napkin around his wrist. So cruelly disappointed was poor Margot, that her eyes filled with tears.

Of course she never dreamed that Gaston despised her love. He ignored it, that was all ; and what could be done for that ? Sometimes Margot would feel resigned ; the next moment impatient and fretful. The most indifferent events became to her subjects for joy or grief. A kind word, a mere look from Gaston, would make her happy a whole day ; then should he cross the drawing-room without noticing her, should he retire in the evening without his usual nod, she would spend the night trying to find out how she could have displeased him. Should

he, perchance, sit near her a few minutes and praise her handiwork, she beamed with joy and gratitude : but if, at dinner time, he declined some dish offered by her, she thought at once that he had ceased loving her.

On certain days she actually felt pity for herself. For whole afternoons she would doubt her beauty, and think herself positively ugly ; then, again, she would revolt, and before her looking-glass shrug her shoulders in utter vexation, thinking of Gaston's indifference. An angry or disappointed impulse would cause her now to rumple her broad, low collar, now to bring down her cap over her eyes ; the next moment her pride called her coquettish instincts to the rescue, and she would appear in the middle of the day, dressed in all her finery and in her Sunday gown, protesting, as it were, with all her might, against the injustice of fate.

Margot in her new condition had preserved the tastes of her earlier estate. Whilst Gaston went out hunting, she often spent the forenoon in the vegetable garden. She knew well how to use the pruning-knife, the rake and the watering-pot, and more than once did she help the gardener with some useful advice. This kitchen-garden stretched behind the house and served

also as a flower-garden, where flowers, fruits and vegetables grew in touching accord. Margot had a special love for a high fruit-wall covered with beautiful peaches. She cared for it tenderly, and every day picked, with a sparing hand, a few fruits for the evening dessert. Upon that lattice-wall grew a peach much larger than all the others, that Margot never had found the heart to pluck. It looked so velvety with its deep purple color, that she dared not detach it from the tree, as if it had been a real crime to destroy such a masterpiece of nature. She had never passed by without glancing at it admiringly, and she had warned the gardener never to touch it as he heeded her anger and her godmother's reproaches. One day, at sunset, Gaston was returning from the hunt ; he crossed the back garden, hurried and thirsty. Stretching his hand toward the fruit-wall as he passed by, he plucked, by mere chance, Margot's favorite peach, biting at it at once with no show of respect. The girl was standing at a little distance, watering a vegetable-bed. She ran toward him in haste ; but the young man, not seeing her, continued on his way. A few bites more, and he threw the fruit behind him. One look showed Margot that the beloved peach

was gone. The sudden movement of Gaston, the thoughtless manner in which he had thrown the peach away, had produced on the child a peculiar and unexpected effect. She was grieved, and at the same time delighted, since she thought that, the burning sun having rendered Gaston very thirsty, her peach must have caused him real pleasure. She picked it up, blew away the dust that soiled it, and, seeing no observing eye, gave it a timid kiss ; at the same time biting it slightly—just for a taste. I do not know what queer idea crossed her mind, but thinking perhaps of the fruit, perhaps of herself, she murmured, “ O, you bad boy, how much you throw away in your ignorance.”

I hope the reader will excuse this narrative of childish events ; but what else have I to tell, my heroine being a child ? Madame Doradour had been invited to dinner in a neighboring castle, one day, and took Gaston and Margot with her. It was quite late when the party broke up, and night had already closed in when our friends drove homeward. Margot and her godmother filled the back seat of the carriage ; Gaston, occupying the front seat alone, had stretched himself, nearly his whole length, upon the cushions. It was a beautiful moonlight night,

but the inside of the carriage was dark ; scarcely a ray of light penetrated it ; the conversation was flagging ; a good dinner, some slight fatigue, the darkness, the cradle-like rocking of the carriage, everything tempted the travellers to sleep. Madame Doradour soon fell into a doze, and as she went to sleep, placed her foot on the seat opposite, not afraid of disturbing Gaston. The outside air being cool, the same thick cloak covered both god-mother and god daughter. Margot, sunk into her corner, did not move although wide awake. She was quite anxious to know if Gaston also was napping. It seemed to her that since her eyes were opened, his were bound to be so too, and she looked toward him without seeing him, and wondered whether he likewise glanced toward her. At times, when a little light strayed into the carriage, she coughed noiselessly. The young man was motionless, and the young girl dared not to speak for fear of disturbing her god-mother's sleep. She stretched her head and looked outside ; the idea of a long voyage so much resembles that of a long love, that in surveying the moonlight and the fields, Margot forgot that she was on her way to la Honville. She half closed her eyelids, and whilst glancing at the passing trees, imag-

ined she was starting for Switzerland or Italy with Madame Doradour and her son. That dream, as you may fancy, led her to many others, and to such sweet ones that she gave herself up to them without reserve. She saw herself, not yet the wife of Gaston, but his affianced bride, going over the world, beloved by him, having the right to love him, and at the end of the journey, there was "Happiness,"—a charming word, constantly repeated, but of which, luckily for her, she but faintly knew the real meaning. To dream better, she closed her eyes completely. She soon went into a doze, and as Madame Doradour had done before, placed her foot on the seat opposite. Chance would have it that this foot,—daintily clad for that matter, and very small,—landed exactly upon Gaston's hand; Gaston did not seem to notice its approach, but Margot awakened with a start. She did not draw back the foot at once, however, but let it softly slide to one side. So well had she been wrapped in her dreams, that her awakening hardly took her away from them. In going to Switzerland with a beloved one is it a crime to place your foot upon the seat where he lies asleep? Little by little, however, the illusion faded away, and Margot began to real-

ize the wild thing she had done. "Did he notice it?" she asked herself; "is he still asleep, or does he pretend to be? And if he slept, how did it not awaken him? Perhaps he feels too great a disdain for me even to show that he felt my foot; perhaps, also, he rather likes it, and is only waiting for me to do it again; perhaps he thinks that I too am asleep. Still it is hardly pleasant to have some other person's foot on your hand—if you do not love her. My shoe must have soiled his glove, for we walked quite a good deal to-day; perhaps he wants to show me that he does not mind such a trifle. What would he say if I did it again? Well, he knows that I would never dare do such a thing; perhaps he guessed my trouble, and is silently amused." While cogitating, Margot withdrew her foot slowly, and with all possible caution; but why did that little foot shake like an aspen-leaf? While feeling its way in the dark, it just touched again the tips of Gaston's fingers. It was so slight and so quick a touch that Margot hardly felt it herself. Never did her heart beat so fast; she trembled as if she were lost, having committed such irreparable imprudence. "What will he now think?" she said to herself. "What opinion will he have of me? In what

awful trouble shall I find myself? Never shall I dare to face his look again. It was wrong enough, my having touched him the first time; but now it is ten times worse. How can I prove that I did not do it on purpose? Boys are such unbelievers. He will make fun of me, and speak of it to everybody, to my godmother first of all, and she will tell it to my father! and oh, I shall never dare show myself in the village! Where shall I go? What will become of me? How can I defend myself? when I certainly did touch him twice, and no woman ever did such a thing? After all this, the least that can happen to me is to be ignominiously sent away." At such a thought Margot shuddered. She racked her brains to find some means of explanation. She projected writing a long letter to Gaston the next morning to be handed to him secretly, telling him that she had placed her foot upon his hand, by mistake, and begging him to forgive and forget it. "But, if he does not sleep?" she thought again. "If he suspects how much I love him? If he has found me out? If he should come to me to-morrow and first speak of our adventure? If he should say that he loves me? If he should make me a declaration!" — Suddenly the carriage

stopped. Gaston, until then fast asleep, awoke, stretching his arms rather uncere-
moniously. He had some trouble to remem-
ber where he was. In the presence of this
discovery, away flew Margot's dreams ; and
when the young man assisted her from the
coach, with that very hand that her foot had
touched, she realized but too clearly that she
had been travelling alone.

VI.

Soon afterwards, two unforeseen events, the
first one somewhat laughable, the second quite
serious, took place nearly at the same time.
One morning Gaston was riding down the
avenue leading to the house, trying a horse he
had just bought, when a young boy, insuf-
ficiently clad in very ragged garments, ap-
proached him with a resolute air and stopped
in front of his horse. It was Pierrot, the
turkey-herder. Gaston, of course, did not
recognize him, and, thinking him a beggar,
threw some change in the cap the boy held in
his hand. Pierrot pocketed the sous, but in-
stead of going away ran after the rider, and
again took his place in front of the steed.
Vainly did Gaston order him off two or three
times ; Pierrot followed and stopped him

again. Finally the young officer cried furiously: "What do you want of me, little wretch? Have you made a bet that I would run over you?"

"Sir," said Pierrot, without budging an inch, "I would like to be the servant of your Honor."

"Of whom?"

"Of your Honor, sir."

"My servant? and why? I should like to know."

"Just to be your Honor's servant."

"But I do not want any new servant. Who told you I was looking for one?"

"Nobody did, sir."

"Why do you ask me, then?"

"Simply because I wish to become your Honor's servant."

"Are you crazy? Or do you dare to be impertinent?"

"No indeed, sir."

"Then take this and begone!" and Gaston, throwing him some more change, turned his horse aside and continued his ride.

Pierrot sat down on the edge of the road, and when Margot happened to pass that way, an hour or so later, she found him shedding hot tears. She ran to him at once.

"What is the matter, my poor Pierrot?" she asked. "What has happened to you?"

At first Pierrot refused to answer, but finally he said, sobbing:

"I want to become his Honor's servant, and he won't let me."

It caused Margot a good deal of trouble to make him explain the matter. At last she understood what he meant. Since she had left the farm, Pierrot felt sorely grieved not to see her any more. Half in shame, and half in tears, he told her of his miseries, and although laughing, she could hardly help pitying him. The poor boy expatiating on his regrets spoke all in one burst, of his friendship for Margot, of his worn-out wooden shoes, of his sad solitude in the fields, of his favorite turkey which had just died; all of which got somewhat mixed in his head. At last, unable to bear his desolation any longer, he had decided to come to la Honville and to ask Gaston to accept him as a servant. It had taken him a week to form that big resolution, and a few minutes to have his request denied. In his misery, he even spoke of dying, rather than to return to the farm-house.

"Since his Honor won't have me," he said, finishing his tale, "and since I cannot be with him as you are with Madane Doradour,

I will let myself starve ; I will." Useless to add that these last words were drowned in a second deluge of tears.

Margot consoled him as best she could ; then, taking him by the hand, she brought him to the house. She led him to the pantry, and to ward off the starvation vow gave him a big slice of bread, with plenty of ham and fruit. Pierrot, the tears still trickling down his cheeks, ate with a strong appetite, meanwhile looking at Margot with his large, loving eyes. She made him easily understand that, to enter any one's service, he must wait for a vacant situation, and she promised, at the proper time, to make a formal request in his behalf. She thanked him also for his friendship, assured him that she liked him just as much as he did her, wiped off his tears, and, kissing him on the brow, with a little maternal affection, induced him finally to take his departure. Pierrot, fully convinced, stuffed his pockets with what remained of his luncheon. To close the bargain, Margot gave him a big silver piece, with which to buy a fine waistcoat and a new pair of wooden shoes. Quite consoled, Pierrot took the young girl's hand, and brought it to his lips, saying in a trembling voice : " Au revoir, Mademoiselle Marguerite." As he walked away, Margot noticed

that the little boy of yore had grown to be quite a big fellow. That reminded her that she was but one year his senior, and so she decided, *in petto*, that on the next occasion she would not kiss him quite so freely.

The next day, she noticed that Gaston, contrary to his habit, had not gone out hunting, and had dressed himself even more carefully than usual. After dinner,—about four o'clock,—the young man gave his mother his arm, and both walked down the avenue. They were talking in a low voice, and seemed preoccupied. Margot, alone in the dining-room, was looking somewhat anxiously out of the window, when a post-chaise drove into the court-yard. Gaston ran at once to the carriage door, and, when he opened it, there alighted first an old lady, then a young lady, about nineteen years old, tastefully dressed and beautiful as daylight. The welcome they received showed to Margot that they were not only persons of high standing, but probably near relations of her godmother. The two best spare-rooms of the house had been made ready for them. When, later, the new-comers entered the drawing-room, Madame Doradour silently notified Margot to leave the room. She did so with a heavy heart, augur-

ing nothing pleasant for her from the stay of these two ladies.

She was wondering, the next day, whether or not she should descend for breakfast, when her godmother came herself to bring her down and to introduce her to Madame and Mademoiselle de Vercelles ; for such was the name of the strangers. Entering the dining-room, Margot noticed at once that a white napkin had been placed before her usual seat, beside Gaston. She took silently, but somewhat sadly, another seat. Her place was occupied by Mademoiselle de Vercelles, and it was soon easy to see how often Gaston looked at his new neighbor. Margot remained dumb all through the meal, and when she served the dish placed before her, Gaston did not even hear her offer it. After breakfast, they all went into the park, and after a few turns upon the gravelled walks, Madame Doradour leaned on the arm of her old friend ; Gaston offered his arm to the beautiful young lady, and Margot, left alone, followed slowly behind. No one thought of the poor child or spoke to her, so she soon turned back and went into the house. At dinner-time, Madame Doradour called for a bottle of sweet Frontignan wine, and as she had preserved the good old customs, she stretched

her hand, before drinking, and invited her guests to touch glasses. Every one obeyed the call, except poor Margot, who hardly knew what to do. However, she raised her glass hoping for encouragement, but no one answered her timid gesture, and she set down her glass without having touched its contents.

"It is a pity that we are not five instead of four," said Madame de Vercelles, after dinner, "for we might have played bouillotte."

It took five people to play bouillotte in those days. Margot, from her corner, did not dare to say that she knew the game, and so her godmother proposed whist, instead. Supper having been brought in, they asked Mademoiselle de Vercelles to sing during dessert. She allowed herself to be begged very long and very hard, and finally she warbled, in a light and graceful voice, a merry little song. As she sung it Margot could not help thinking of her father's house where she was the one asked to sing at dessert. When they all retired she found, on entering her room, that two of her favorite pieces of furniture had been carried off: a large sofa, and a small inlaid table upon which she placed her mirror when combing her hair. Having opened the window, all in a tremble, to con-

temple, for an instant, the light behind Gaston's drawn curtains—it was her every evening good-bye—she found no light, and all the shutters closed. She went to bed heart-broken and passed a sleepless night.

What motives brought the two strangers here and how long would they stay? These were two questions to which Margot found no answer. It was only too certain that it had something to do with the whispered conversation between mother and son. There was an unfathomable mystery, but that mystery, Margot felt, was about to annihilate her bliss. At first, she thought the ladies were relatives; but too much was made of them to admit of such a simple explanation. While walking, Madame Doradour never failed to point out to the mother how far the park extended and whispered a number of details about the products and the value of the estate. She meant, perhaps, to sell la Honville; then what would become of Margot's people? Would the new-comer be willing to keep the old farmers? And then, on the other side, why should Madame Doradour sell the place? She, so wealthy, to think of selling the place she was born upon and on which her son's fancy was so completely centred? The strange ladies came

from Paris ; they spoke of it constantly and seemed indifferent to country life. Madame de Vercelles mentioned, at supper-time, that she often approached the Empress, and had even accompanied her to Malmaison and enjoyed the hospitality of her sovereign. Then, perhaps, it was only a question of promotion for Gaston, and all these flatteries went to the lady in high standing at court. Such were Margot's conjectures ; but whatever effort she made, her mind felt dissatisfied, and her heart obstinately refused to admit the only probable supposition,—after all the only true one.

Two servants had, with difficulty, brought a large wooden box into Mademoiselle de Vercelles' apartment. Once, as Margot was leaving her room, she heard the sound of a piano. It was the first time in her life that her ears had been struck with such exquisite chords. All the instrumental music she knew of was the country dances of her village. She stopped, all in a flutter of admiration. First, Mademoiselle de Vercelles played a waltz ; then changing the tune, she began to sing to her own accompaniment. Margot approached the door on tiptoes and listened. The words were Italian. The softness of that unknown tongue seemed to Margot still

more extraordinary than the harmonies of the instrument. What mysterious words could that beautiful maiden be speaking in the midst of so strange a melody? Margot, overcome by curiosity, wiped her eyes, half filled with tears, and stooping, looked through the key-hole. She saw Mademoiselle de Vercelles in her *deshabillé* : bare arms, floating hair, open lips, and uplifted eyes. She seemed to her like an angel; for never before had she seen anything so charming. She walked away slowly, dazzled and at the same time despairing, unable to understand her own emotions. But, while descending the stairs, she repeated over and over again, with a tremble in her voice, "Oh! Sacred Virgin! the lovely beauty, the lovely beauty!"

VII.

Is it not singular that in this world the parties most directly interested in daily events are always the most easily self-deceived? Indeed, in this case, even an indifferent witness of Gaston's attitude towards Mademoiselle de Vercelles, would have found at once how deeply he had fallen in love with her. But Margot saw nothing, perhaps be-

cause she refused to see anything. In spite of her unconscious grief, an unexplainable feeling, that the reader may judge improbable, hindered her, for a long time, from discovering the truth : this feeling was no other than her great admiration for Mademoiselle de Vercelles.

Mademoiselle de Vercelles was tall, blonde, graceful. She did more than please ; she had, if I may say so, a kind of consoling beauty. Her look, her speech had such peculiar, such soft calmness, that it seemed impossible to resist the charm she spread around her. After a few days, she began to show quite a liking for Margot ; she even went some length to conquer the young girl. She taught her mysterious embroidery stitches ; she took her arm as they walked through the park, and induced her soon to sing a few of her simple village melodies, accompanying her on the piano. Margot, although nearly heartbroken, received with great gratitude these tokens of good-will. Three days had elapsed,—three days of utter solitude for Margot,—before the young Parisian beauty spoke to her for the first time. Had not Margot good cause to give a little start, a mixture of pleasure, fear and surprise ? She had suffered so deeply to find herself

utterly neglected by Gaston, that a suspicion of the real state of things had dawned even in her mind. Thus did she find, in that action of her rival, a kind of bitter delight. First of all she felt an intense relief at being at last taken out of her sudden isolation ; and the regard of such a lovely creature flattered her not a little. Such beauty, that ought to have inspired her with jealousy, enchanted her, from the first words uttered. Becoming quickly more familiar, she conceived a deep passion for Mademoiselle de Vercelles. Having admired her face, she enjoyed and praised her deportment, her exquisite simplicity, the graceful undulation of her stately head, even her least piece of finery. Her eyes constantly followed the lovely stranger, and she listened with deep attention to every word she spoke. Did Mademoiselle de Vercelles sit before the piano the eyes of Margot seemed to say exultingly, "My darling friend is going to play." For she called her such pet names, not without a childish feeling of satisfied vanity. Did they walk out towards the village, the peasants would turn around and look at the fair stranger, to the total indifference of Mademoiselle de Vercelles, but to the blushing joy of Margot. Every morning, just before breakfast, she would call upon

her kind friend ; she helped her to finish her toilet, looked at her lovely white hands and listened to her as she sang those beautiful Italian songs. Then she went down to the drawing-room with her, proud if she could catch some *arietta* and hum it timidly on the staircase. And with all that, she was devoured by grief, and when alone would cry until her heart nearly broke.

Madame Doradour was too light-minded to notice any change in her god-daughter. Sometimes, however, she would say, "You are pale, dearie, this morning ; did you not sleep well ?" Then without waiting for an answer, she would busy herself elsewhere. Gaston was more clear-sighted, and if he gave a thought to the matter, he probably guessed the cause of Margot's melancholy ; but he judged that it was nothing more than a child's fancy, or a little feminine jealousy that time would surely heal. Meantime, Margot constantly avoided being alone with him. The thought of a tête-à-tête was enough to put her in a tremble, and, when walking alone, she would turn away if she espied him, even in the distance.

The young man thought these precautions the marks of an ultra-timid disposition. "Funny little girl," would he say often, as

he saw her turn away precipitately on his coming near. To tease her in her trouble, he had approached sometimes in spite of her. Then would Margot lower her head, answer nothing but monosyllables, and sink in herself, as it were, like those flowers they call "sensitive plants."

So went the days, in extreme monotony. Gaston neglected the hunt ; they played cards but seldom ; nor did they walk much. It was talk, talk all the while ; and two or three times a day, Madame Doradour would wink Margot away to leave the others more at liberty. The poor girl was constantly going and coming from her chamber. Did she come into the drawing-room without being sent for, she would see the two mothers nod to each other, and the whole party relapsing into a dead silence ; when called back at the close of some long secret conversation, she sat down without lifting her eyes, and her anxiety was much like what one feels, when, at sea, the sky being still pure and bright, a storm begins to brew slowly in the far-away horizon.

One morning, as she was passing the door of Mademoiselle de Vercelles, that young lady called her in. After a few commonplace remarks, Margot noticed a

pretty ring on one of her dear friend's fingers.

"Try it on," said Mademoiselle de Vercelles ; "let us see how it fits you."

"Oh, mademoiselle, my hand is not handsome enough for such jewels."

"Well, well, never mind ; that ring suits you to a nicety, I will make you a present of it on my bridal day."

"Are you going to marry ?" queried Margot, all excitement.

"Who knows ?" answered Mademoiselle de Vercelles, laughing, "such accidents happen to us girls."

You may guess in what anxiety these few words threw poor Margot ; she repeated them to herself, over and over again, day and night, almost mechanically, and without daring to sift their meaning. Shortly afterward, as the coffee was brought in, at supper time, Gaston handed her a cup which she refused softly, saying : "Wait, and give it to me on your marriage day." The young man smiled, somewhat surprised, but answered nothing. Madam Doradour frowned, however, and requested Margot, rather tartly, to mind her own business.

Margot did so. She felt that what she wanted and so much dreaded to know was

now proved by that very circumstance. She ran to her room, locked herself in and, burying her head in her hands, began to cry bitterly. As soon as she had recovered a little, she made sure that the bolts were drawn, so that no one could witness her grief. Then, away from all, she felt herself free to read in her soul the story of her trouble.

In spite of her extreme youth and of her mad love, Margot was possessed of much common sense. So the first thing she realized was her utter powerlessness to fight against settled events. She understood at last that Gaston loved Mademoiselle de Vercelles, that the two families had agreed on that weighty point, and that the marriage was decided upon. Perhaps even the day had been appointed. And now she remembered having noticed, in the library, a man, all dressed in black, and writing upon officially stamped paper : a notary, no doubt, preparing the settlement-deeds. Mademoiselle de Vercelles was rich ; so would Gaston be after his mother's demise ; what could Margot do against so natural and so equitable an arrangement ? She thought the matter over carefully, and the more she thought, the more unconquerable she found the obstacles. Unable to stop the marriage, she decided that.

all she could do would be to be absent herself at its celebration. She pulled at once her little trunk from under her bed, and placed it in the middle of the room, so as to pack up her things and return to her parents; then her courage suddenly failed her, and instead of opening the box, she sat upon it and began to cry anew. So she remained for an hour, in a really pitiful state. The motives which had struck her mind so forcibly began to get rather mixed, her tears made her almost dizzy; she vainly shook her head so as to be freed from them. While she was worrying and trying to come to some final decision, she had not noticed her candle burning out. Suddenly she found herself in the dark; she got up, opened the door and went out for a light. It was deep night already, and everybody in bed. She walked on, however, feeling her way, never believing that the hour was so late.

When she found herself, as she reached the stairs, all in the dark and alone in the house, as it were, fright—a very natural feeling for one so young—seized her violently. She had gone over a long passage leading from her room; there she stopped, hardly daring to retrace her steps. It sometimes happens that a very trivial circumstance will suddenly

change the course of our thoughts, and darkness, better than anything else, produces such an effect. The stairway at la Honville,—as is the case in many old-fashioned buildings,—was constructed in a small adjacent tower. This stairway, which was spiral, wound around, inside a hollow stone pillar, filling it almost completely. In her hesitation, Margot leaned against this pillar ; its icy coldness, her fright and her grief, all combined, seemed to freeze her blood. She stood, a minute, motionless ; a sinister thought flashed through her mind ; her present faintness made her crave for death—but that idea, strange to say, lasted but a second, and when it vanished, her strength seemed to have come back. She retreated to her room and locked herself in again, until dawn.

As soon as the sun was out, she descended to the park. That year, the autumn was superb ; the foliage in its yellow tints showed a lovely golden hue ; no leaves as yet had fallen from the branches, and the drowsy and mellow wind seemed to respect the trees of la Honville. The season of the birds' tardy love-making was only beginning. Poor Margot did not know so much ; still, the beneficent heat of the sun acted as a softening balm upon her grief. She began to think of her

father, of her family, of religion ; she turned to her first impulse : to leave and to resign herself. She even came to think that departure was not so necessary after all ; she asked herself what harm she had committed that she should be thus condemned to banishment from a place where she had been so happy. She imagined that she could remain ; suffering most certainly, but suffering less than if she had gone away. She walked on, in the darker paths, now with slow lingering steps, now with great hurried strides ; now she would stop and say, "To love is a great thing ; how much courage one must have to love." And this bracing thought, added to the certainty that no one in the world knew of her passion, made her hope in spite of herself. Hope what ? She did not know, and, just for that reason, she hoped all the more. Her beloved secret seemed so deeply buried in her heart that she could hardly find the courage to tear it out. She swore to keep it there forever, and to protect it against all, should it lie in her bosom for all time to come. Against reason, illusions again triumphed over her ; and loving as a child, grieving as a child, she consoled herself as a child. She thought of Gaston's blond hair, of the windows of the Rue du

Perche ; she tried to convince herself that the marriage was not settled yet, that she had surely misunderstood her god-mother ; and then she lay down at the foot of a tree, and, exhausted by emotion and fatigue, she fell slowly asleep.

It was noon when she awakened. She looked around, hardly remembering her troubles. A slight noise heard at a distance caused her to turn her head ; she saw, coming toward her under the overhanging foliage, Gaston and Mademoiselle de Vercelles ; they were alone, and could not see Margot hidden in the thicket. About the middle of the way Mademoiselle de Vercelles stopped and sat down upon a rustic bench ; Gaston remained a moment standing before her, looking into her eyes with radiant fondness ; then he leaned on one knee, placed his arms around her and kissed her.

At this sight Margot rose as if possessed ; an inexpressible despair overwhelmed her, and, unconscious of thought or act, she fled away, running toward the open fields.

VIII.

Since Pierrot had failed in his great plan of entering Gaston's service, he had become

day by day a sadder boy. The consolation he had received from Margot's lips had quieted him but a moment ; it lasted hardly longer than the provisions that filled his pockets. The more he thought of his dear Margot, the more he felt that he could not live away from her ; and, to speak the truth, neither his life on the farm, nor his usual associates, were such as to make him forget his love. Thus it was that, on the very day of our heroine's great despair, he was walking on the river bank, dreamily driving before him his turkey-flock. He suddenly noticed, a hundred feet distant, a woman running breathlessly, who, after wandering here and there for a moment, all at once disappeared among the willow trees that lined the river. Such a sight surprised and troubled Pierrot. He also began to run, trying to come up with the stranger ; but as he reached the place where he had last seen her, he looked in vain for her fleeing figure over the neighboring fields. He thought at first she must have entered the mill, which stood close by ; then seized with a fatal presentiment, he began following the down-current. The Eure had been swollen recently by heavy rainfalls, and to Pierrot, hardly in a merry mood, its waves had a sinister aspect. He thought he saw

something white struggling among the rushes ; he approached, and having stretched himself full length upon the shore, succeeded in bringing to the bank a corpse—the corpse of Margot herself. No sign of life appeared on the poor girl's face : she was lying there motionless, cold as marble, her eyes open and still.

At the sight Pierrrot uttered such a shriek that the people at the mill all came out in a crowd. His grief was so violent that his first impulse was to throw himself into the water, so as to follow in death the only being he had ever loved. But he bethought himself suddenly that drowned people could be called back to life if cared for properly and in good time. The peasants all maintained that Margot was dead, but he refused to believe them, nor would he allow her body to be taken to the mill. Carrying the corpse on his shoulders and walking as fast as he could, he brought the dead girl to his own poor cabin. Heaven willed that on the way he met the village doctor making his medical round on horseback ; he stopped him and forced him to enter his abode, so as to hear from his own lips if there really remained no hope.

The doctor agreed with the peasants ;

hardly had he seen the corpse when he cried out : " She is dead, dead ; there is nothing left but to bury her. Judging from the state of the body, she must have been under the water fifteen minutes, at least." Upon which declaration the doctor walked out of the cabin, and, preparing himself to resume his ride, stated that the village mayor should be notified at once.

Not only did Pierrot love Margot passionately, but he was besides a very obstinate fellow. He knew very well that the poor girl had not been fifteen minutes under the water, since he had almost seen her throw herself in the river. So he ran after the doctor, begging him, in the name of heaven, not to leave without trying all earthly resources.

" But what resources are there ? " cried the doctor, out of temper. " I have with me not even one of the necessary instruments ! "

" I'll go and fetch them all for you, sir," answered Pierrot. " Just tell me where they are and wait for me here ; I'll be back in no time. "

The physician, in a hurry to leave, bit his lips at his silliness in having spoken of instruments ; but although persuaded of the hopelessness of his task, he felt that he could not go without doing something, if he wanted

to save his reputation from general condemnation.

"Go then, and make haste," he said to Pierrot. "You will ask my housekeeper for my great tin box, and you will find me here when you come back ; in the mean time, I'll wrap the body in the bed-covers and try what rubbing may do. Bring also with you some cinders ; we will warm them here ; but it will amount to nothing more than a loss of time," added he, shrugging his shoulders and stamping his foot. "Now be quick ! Do you hear me ?"

"Yes, sir," said Pierrot, "and to go faster, if your Honor will let me, I'll take your Honor's horse."

And without waiting for the doctor's permission, he climbed on to the horse and disappeared. A quarter of an hour later, he was coming back, galloping, with two large bags full of cinders, one before, and the other behind him. "Your Honor sees that I've lost no time," he said, pointing at the horse, all out of breath. "I didn't talk on the way, I assure you ; your housekeeper was out, so I settled everything myself."

"The devil you did," grumbled the doctor. "Here is my horse in a pretty state for my day's work !" and, still more out of

sorts, he began to insufflate, by means of a bladder, some air in poor Margot's mouth, while Pierrot rubbed her arms with a will. The fire was soon lighted and the warm cinders were spread over the bed so as to cover it all. The doctor poured some brandy between Margot's lips, then shook his head and pulled out his watch. "I am very sorry," he said, trying to look concerned, "but I cannot allow the dead ones to harm the sick ones ; they are waiting for me, quite a distance off, and I must go now."

"If your Honor will stay just one half-hour more," said Pierrot, "I'll give you a crown."

"No, my boy, that must not be ; I do not want your money."

"Here it is," said Pierrot, slipping it in his hand, as if he had not heard the answer.

It was all the poor lad possessed in the world ; he had dragged it from under his straw mattress ; and the doctor took it, of course.

"All right," said he, "one half-hour more ; but, after that, I go—prayers or no prayers. Don't you see that it is all useless ?"

Half an hour later, Margot still stiff and ice-cold, had shown no sign of returning life.

The doctor felt her pulse ; then, fully decided to go, he took his hat and cane and walked towards the horse. Pierrot, all his money gone, and his supplications of no avail, followed the physician out of the hut and stood in front of his nag, in that same decided attitude he had displayed when he met Gaston on the avenue.

"What is the matter now," cried the physician, "do you want me to sleep here?"

"No, sir," answered Pierrot ; "but you'll have to stay for half an hour more ; that will rest your horse." As he spoke he fondled in his hand a stout club and looked the doctor so squarely in the eye, that the latter re-entered the shanty, crying out in the highest dudgeon, "The obstinate fellow be blown ; his crown will make me lose a louis !"

"But," said Pierrot, "don't they say that the poor things sometimes come back to life six hours after the accident?"

"What? Six hours? Never in the world ; anyhow, do you expect me to stay here six hours?"

"So you shall, indeed," cried Pierrot, "the full six hours ; unless you leave me your box, the tubes and all. Seeing you blow a couple of hours more, I'll know how to use them."

The doctor vainly worked himself into a rage ; he had to give in, willy nilly, and he was kept there busy for two long hours.

Then only did Pierrot, himself about to lose all hope, let his prisoner escape. He was thus left alone, standing at the foot of the bed, almost overcome by discouragement, and so he spent the rest of the day, his eyes riveted on Margot's face. Night having set in, he shook himself, thinking it was time to go and apprise Goodman Piédeleu of his daughter's death. He went out of the hut, closing the door behind him ; as he closed it, he seemed to hear a feeble voice calling him back ; he gave a start and ran to the bed ; nothing had changed ; he thought himself deluded. But that single second of hope changed his resolutions : " I will not leave her yet," he said ; " to-morrow will be time enough," and he sat down beside the couch.

As he attentively considered Margot's features, he thought suddenly that he saw a change. Just before leaving her, she had her teeth pressed tight, and, now, the mouth seemed half opened ; at once he took hold of the doctor's apparatus and tried to blow, as the latter had done, between Margot's lips ; but he managed the thing so awk-

wardly, that the tube and the bladder did not work together. All the air he blew seemed wasted ; a few drops of ammonia poured down the girl's lips could not reach her throat. He worked the tube again, but to no effect ; nothing seemed to succeed. "What stupid machines," he cried at last, all out of breath. "They are no good anyway," and throwing aside the instrument, he leaned over Margot, placed his lips over hers, and in a desperate effort, blowing with all the might of his powerful lungs, he sent a gust of vital air through the young girl's breast. At that very moment some of the cinders were thrown away, two feeble arms were lifted, and fell around Pierrot's neck. Margot uttered a profound sigh and cried out, "I freeze, I freeze !"

"No, you don't," answered Pierrot ; "you are covered with good warm cinders."

"That's so. But why have they put me here ?"

"Oh ! just to do you good, that's all. How do you feel now ?"

"Not so very bad. But how tired I am. Just try and raise me up a little."

Goodman Piédeleu and Madame Doradour, notified by the doctor, just entered the hut as the half-drowned girl, partly undressed,

and leaning lazily in Pierrot's arms, was swallowing a spoonful of cherry-brandy.

"Well, I declare!" said the goodman. "What is it you have been telling me? Do you know that it's a crime to come and tell people that their daughter is dead? You had better not try such a jest on me again, I swear!" and he threw himself on his daughter's neck.

"Take care, dear papa," she said, smiling. "Don't hug me too hard; it's but a little while since I was dead."

Hardly need I paint the surprise, the delight, of Madame Doradour and of all Margot's relatives who came rushing in, one after the other. Gaston also came, and Mademoiselle de Vercelles; but Madame Doradour having taken the father aside, the goodman began to understand how things stood. Reflection, coming just a little too late, had thrown a clear light on the matter.

When the goodman had been told that love was the cause of his daughter's desperate resolve, and that she had nearly paid with her life for her stay at her godmother's house, he paced up and down the room for a while. Then, rather roughly, he said to Madame Doradour: "We are quits now, Madame; I owed you much, but I have repaid you in full."

And taking his daughter by the hand he led her to a corner of the hut. "Look at this, unhappy child," he said, handing her a white sheet prepared for a shroud ; "if you are an honest girl, keep it for me, and don't go a-drowning again." Then coming to Pierrot, he slapped him on the shoulder heartily : "Why don't you speak out, sir," he cried ; "you, who blow so well in girls' mouths ? Shall I not pay you back that crown you gave to the doctor ?"

"Yes, sir," answered Pierrot, "you can pay it back ; but nothing more ; not because I am proud, but because, although I am of no account, I"

"Go away, you stupid !" replied the good-man, giving him a second sounding slap. "I'll bet that fellow has blown in her mouth for an hour, and has not even kissed her !"

IX.

Ten years have elapsed. The victorious disasters of 1814 have covered France with soldiers. Surrounded by all Europe's powers, the Emperor finishes as he has begun, finding again all the genius of his Italian campaigns. The Russian divisions, marching towards Paris along the shores of the Seine, have just been routed at Nangis, where

ten thousand of the foreigners have fallen. On the evening of that day, an officer, badly wounded and hardly able to sit his horse, had left the army-corps commanded by General Gérard and was trying to reach Etampes by the main road through Beauce.

As he passed a prosperous farm-house, he knocked at the door, asking shelter for the night. The farmer,—a sturdy fellow, less than twenty-five years old,—had welcomed him and given him his supper, when the farmer's wife came in, a young mother of five children. Seeing her enter, the officer started back in surprise, while the handsome woman bowed before him, smiling.

“Am I mistaken?” asked the officer; “have you not been lady companion to Madame Doradour, and is not your name Marguerite?”

“At your service,” answered the farmer's wife; “and if I remember well, I am speaking now to Colonel Count Gaston de la Honville. Here is Pierrot Blanchard, my husband, to whom I owe it that I am still alive; kiss my children, Monsieur le Comte, they are all that is left of a family that has long and faithfully served yours.”

“Is it possible?” answered the officer; “but what has become of your brothers?”

"They all remained on the battle-fields of Champaubert and Montmirail," said the woman in a trembling voice, "and six years ago our father preceded them."

"I, also," pursued the officer, "I have lost my mother, and that single death left me as alone as you are." At these words he wiped away a tear.

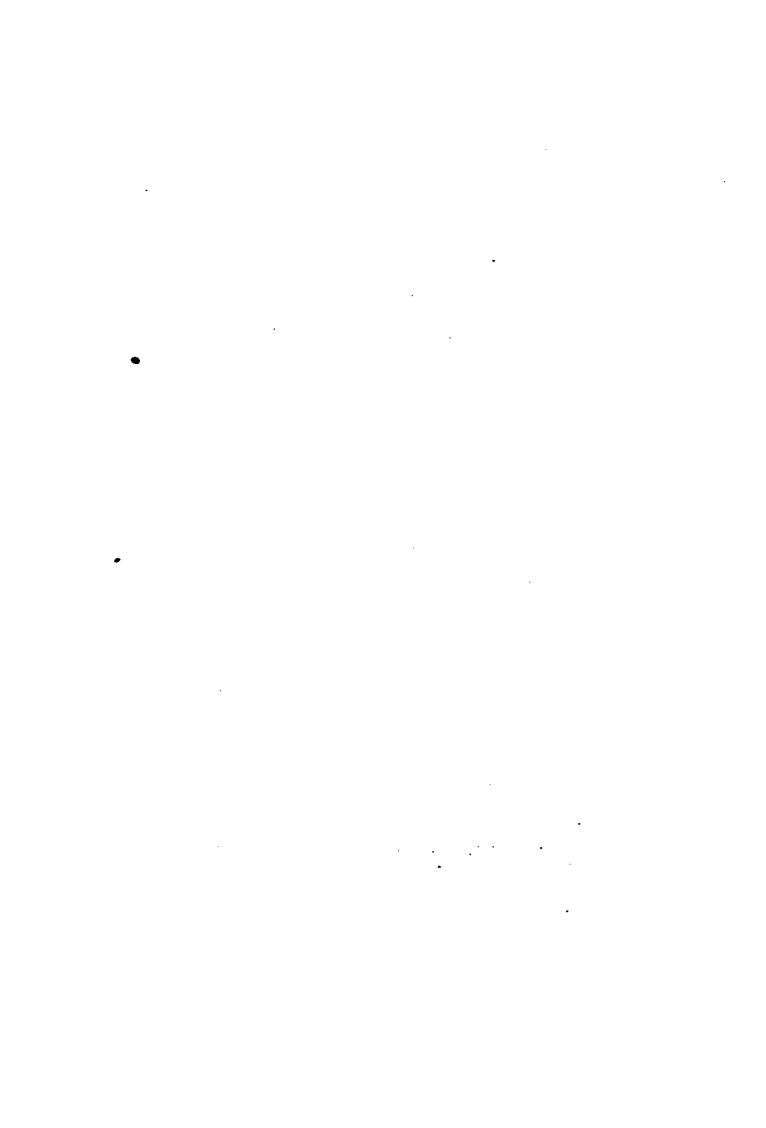
"Never mind, Pierrot," he added gayly, addressing the husband and stretching his glass toward him, "let us drink to the memory of our dead and to the health of your children. There are hard times in life ; the only thing is to get over them."

The next day, as he left the farm, the officer thanked his hosts, and as he was about mounting his horse he could not help asking the farmer's wife :

"And your old love, Margot, do you think of it sometimes?"

"Well—Monsieur le Comte," answered Margot, "I believe I must have left it in the river."

"And with your Honor's permission," added Pierrot, "I don't think I'll fetch it back."



THE BEAUTY-SPOT.

THE BEAUTY-SPOT.

I.

IN 1756, when Louis XV., wearied with the quarrels between the magistrature and the grand council, about the "two sous tax,"* determined upon holding a special *lit de justice*, the members of Parliament resigned. Sixteen of these resignations were accepted, and as many exiles decreed. "But," said Madame de Pompadour to one of the presidents, "could you calmly stand by and see a handful of men resist the authority of the King of France? Would you not have a very bad opinion of such a policy? Throw off the cloak of petty pretence, M. le President, and you will see the situation just as I see it myself."

It was not only the exiles that had to pay the penalty of their want of compliance, but also their relatives and friends. The viola-

* Two sous per livre from the tenth of the revenue.

tion of mail-secrets was one of the King's amusements. To relieve the monotony of his other pleasures, it pleased him to hear his favorite read all the curious things that were to be found in his subjects' private correspondence. Of course, under the fallacious pretext of doing his own detective work, he reaped a large harvest of enjoyment from the thousand little intrigues which thus passed under his eyes ; but whoever was connected, whether closely or in a remote degree, with the leaders of the factions, was almost invariably ruined.

Every one knows that Louis XV., with all his manifold weaknesses, had one, and only one, strong point :—he was inexorable.

One evening, as he sat before the fire with his feet on the mantelpiece, melancholy as was his wont, the marquise, looking through a packet of letters, suddenly burst into a laugh and shrugged her shoulders. The King wished to know what was the matter.

" Why, I have found here," answered she, " a letter, without a grain of common sense in it, but a very touching thing, for all that,—quite pitiable in fact."

" Whose is the signature ? " said the King.

" There is none, it is a love-letter."

" And what is the address ? "

"That is just the point. It is addressed to Mademoiselle d'Annebault, the niece of my good friend, Madame d'Estrades. Apparently it has been put in among these papers on purpose for me to see."

"And what is there in it?" the King persisted.

"Why, I tell you it is all about love. There is mention also of Vauvert and of Neauflette. Are there any gentlemen in those parts? Does your Majesty know of any?"

The King always prided himself upon knowing France by heart, that is, the nobility of France. The etiquette of his court, which he had studied thoroughly, was not more familiar to him than the armorial bearings of his realm. Not a very wide range of learning; still nothing beyond it did he reckon worthy the study; and it was a point of vanity with him, the social hierarchy being, in his eyes, something like the marble staircase of his palace; he must set foot on it as sole lord and master. After having pondered a few moments, he knitted his brow, as though struck by an unwelcome remembrance; then, with a sign to the marquise to read, he threw himself back in his easy-chair, saying with a smile:

"Read on,—she is a pretty girl."

Madame de Pompadour assumed her sweetest tone of raillery and began to read a long letter, which, from beginning to end, was one rhapsody of love.

"Just see," said the writer, "how the fates persecute me ! At first everything seemed to work for the fulfilment of my wishes, and you yourself, my sweet one, had you not given me reason to hope for happiness ? I must however renounce this heavenly dream, and that for no fault of mine. Is it not an excess of cruelty to have let me catch a glimpse of paradise, only to dash me into the abyss ? When some unfortunate wretch is doomed to death, do they take a barbarous pleasure in placing before his eyes all that would make him love life and regret leaving it ? Such is, however, my fate : I have no other refuge, no other hope, than the tomb, for, in my dire misfortune, I can no longer dream of winning your hand. When fate smiled on me, all my hopes were that you should be mine ; to-day, a poor man, I should abhor myself if I dared still to think of such blessedness, and, now that I can no longer make you happy, though dying of love for you, I forbid you to love me—"

The Marquise smiled at these last words.

"Madame," said the King, "this is an

honorable man. But what prevents him from marrying his lady-love?"

"Permit me, sire, to continue."

"—This overwhelming injustice from the best of kings, surprises me. You know that my father asked for me a commission as cornet or ensign in the Guards, and that on this appointment depended the happiness of my life, since it would give me the right to offer myself to you. The Duc de Biron proposed my name; but the King rejected me in a manner the memory of which is very bitter to me. If my father has his own way of looking at things (admitting that it is a wrong one) must I suffer for it? My devotion to the King is as true, as unbounded, as my love for you. How gladly would I give proof of both these sentiments, could I but draw the sword! Assuredly I feel deeply distressed at my request being refused; but that I should be thus disgraced without good reason is a thing opposed to the well-known kindness of his Majesty."

"Aha!" said the King, "I am becoming interested."

"—If you knew how very dull we are! Ah! my friend! This estate of Neauflette, this country-house of Vauvert, these wooded glades!—I wander about them all day long.

I have forbidden a rake to be used ; the sacrilegious gardener came yesterday with his iron-shod besom. He was about to touch the sand. But the trace of your steps, lighter than the wind, was not effaced. The prints of your little feet and of your red satin heels were still upon the path ; they seemed to walk before me, as I followed your beautiful image, and that charming phantom took shape at times as though it were treading in the fugitive prints. It was there, while conversing with you by the flower-beds, that it was granted me to know you, to appreciate you. A brilliant education joined to the spirit of an angel, the dignity of a queen with the grace of a nymph, thoughts worthy of Leibnitz expressed in language so simple, Plato's bee on the lips of Diana, all this enfolded me as in a veil of adoration. And, during those delicious moments, the darling flowers were blooming about us, I inhaled their breath whilst listening to you, in their perfume your memory lived. They droop their heads now ; they present to me the semblance of death ! ”

“ This is all Rousseau and water,” said the King. “ Why do you read such stuff to me ? ”

“ Because your Majesty commanded me to

do so, for the sake of Mademoiselle d'Annebault's beautiful eyes."

"It is true, she has beautiful eyes."

"—And when I return from these walks, I find my father alone, in the great drawing-room, near the lighted candle, leaning on his elbow, amidst the faded gildings which cover our mouldy wainscot. It is with pain that he sees me enter. My grief disturbs his. Athénaïs ! At the back of that drawing-room, near the window, is the harpsichord over which flitted those sweet fingers that my lips have touched but once,—once, while yours opened softly to harmonies of celestial music,—opened with such dainty art that your songs were but a smile. How happy are they,—Rameau, Lulli, Duni, and so many more ! Yes, yes, you love them,—they are in your memory,—their breath has passed through your lips. I too seat myself at that harpsichord, I strive to play one of those airs that you love ;—how cold, how monotonous they seem to me ! I leave them and listen to their dying accents while the echo loses itself beneath that lugubrious vault. My father turns to me and sees me distressed,—what can he do ? Some boudoir gossip, some report from the servants' hall has closed upon us the gates that lead into the world. He

sees me young, ardent, full of life, asking only to live in this world, he is my father, and can do nothing for me."

"One would think," said the King, "that this fellow was starting for the hunt, and that his falcon had been killed on his wrist. Against whom is he inveighing, may I ask?"

"—It is quite true," continued the Marquise, reading in a lower tone, "It is quite true that we are near neighbors, and distant relatives, of the Abbé Chauvelin. . . ."

"That is what it is, is it? said Louis XV., yawning. "Another nephew of the *enquêtes et requêtes*. My Parliament abuses my bounty; it really has too large a family."

"But if it is only a *distant* relative!"

"Enough; all these people are good for nothing. This Abbé Chauvelin is a Jansenist; not a bad sort of fellow, in his way; but he has dared to resign. Please, throw the letter into the fire, and let me hear no more about it."

II.

If these last words of the King were not exactly a death-warrant, they were something like a refusal of permission to live. What could a young man without fortune do, in 1756,

whose King would not hear his name mentioned? He might have looked for a clerkship, or tried to turn philosopher, or poet, perhaps; but without official dedication, the trade was worth nothing.

And besides, such was not, by any means, the vocation of the Chevalier Vauvert, who had written, with tears, the letter which made the King laugh. At this very moment, alone with his father, in the old château of Neauflette, his look was desperate and gloomy, even to frenzy, as he paced to and fro.

"I must go to Versailles," he said.

"And what will you do there?"

"I know not; but what am I doing here?"

"You keep me company. It certainly cannot be very amusing for you, and I will not in any way seek to detain you. But do you forget that your mother is dead?"

"No, sir. I promised her to consecrate to you the life that you gave me. I will come back, but I must go. I really cannot stay in this place any longer."

"And why, if I may ask?"

"My desperate love is the only reason. I love Mademoiselle d'Annebault madly."

"But you know that it is useless. It is only Molière who contrives successful matches without dowries. Do you forget

too the disfavor with which I am regarded?"

"Ah! sir, that disfavor! Might I be allowed, without deviating from the profound respect I owe you, to ask what caused it? We do not belong to the Parliament. We pay the tax; we do not order it. If the Parliament stints the King's purse, it is his affair, not ours. Why should M. l'Abbé Chauvelin drag us into his ruin?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé Chauvelin acts as an honest man. He refuses to approve the 'dixième' tax because he is disgusted at the prodigality of the court. Nothing of this kind would have taken place in the days of Madame de Chateauroux! She was beautiful, at least, that woman, and did not cost us anything, not even what she so generously gave. She was sovereign mistress, and declared that she would be satisfied if the King did not send her to rot in some dungeon when he should be pleased to withdraw his good graces from her. But this Étioles, this le Normand, this insatiable Poisson!"

"What does it matter?"

"What does it matter! say you? More than you think. Do you know that now, at this very time, while the King is plundering us, the fortune of this grisette is incalculable?"

She began by contriving to get an annuity of a hundred and eighty thousand livres—but that was a mere bagatelle, it counts for nothing now ; you can form no idea of the startling sums that the King showers upon her ; three months of the year cannot pass without her picking up, as though by chance, some five or six hundred thousand livres—yesterday out of the salt-tax, to-day out of the increase in the appropriation for the Royal mews. Although she has her own quarters in the royal residences, she buys la Selle, Cressy, Aulnay, Brimborion, Marigny, Saint-Remy, Bellevue, and a number of other estates,—mansions in Paris, in Fontainebleau, Versailles, Compiègne,—without counting secret hoards in all the banks of Europe, to be used in case of her own disgrace or a demise of the crown. And who pays for all this, if you please ? ”

“ That I do not know, sir, but, certainly, not I.”

“ It is you, as well as everybody else. It is France, it is the people who toil and moil, who riot in the streets, who insult the statue of Pigalle. But Parliament will endure it no longer, it will have no more new imposts. As long as there was question of defraying the cost of the war, our last crown was ready ; we

had no thought of bargaining. The victorious King could see clearly that he was beloved by the whole kingdom, still more so when he was at the point of death. Then all dissensions, all faction, all ill-feeling ceased. All France knelt before the sick-bed of the King, and prayed for him. But if we pay, without counting, for his soldiers and his doctors, we will no longer pay for his mistresses; we have other things to do with our money than to support Madame de Pompadour."

"I do not defend her, sir. I could not pretend to say either that she was in the wrong or in the right. I have never seen her."

"Doubtless; and you would not be sorry to see her,—is it not so?—in order to have an opinion on the subject? For, at your age, the head judges through the eyes. Try it then, if the fancy takes you. But the satisfaction will be denied you."

"Why, sir?"

"Because such an attempt is pure folly; because this marquise is as invisible in her little boudoir at Brimboration as the Grand Turk in his seraglio; because every door will be shut in your face. What are you going to do? Attempt an impossibility? Court fortune like an adventurer?"

"By no means, but like a lover. I do not intend to supplicate, sir, but to protest against an injustice. I had a well-founded hope, almost a promise, from M. de Biron ; I was on the eve of possessing the object of my love, and this love is not unreasonable ; you have not disapproved of it. Let me venture, then, to plead my own cause. Whether I shall appeal to the King or to Madame de Pompadour I know not, but I wish to set out."

"You do not know what the court is, and you wish to present yourself there."

"I may perhaps be the more easily received for the very reason that I am unknown there."

"You unknown, Chevalier ! What are you thinking about ? With such a name as yours ! We are gentlemen of an old stock, Monsieur ; you could not be unknown."

"Well, then, the King will listen to me."

"He will not even hear you. You see Versailles in your dreams, and you will think yourself there when your postilion stops his horses at the city gates. Suppose you get as far as the antechamber,—the gallery, the Oeil-de Bœuf ; perhaps there may be nothing between his Majesty and yourself but the thickness of a door ; there will still be an abyss for

you to cross. You will look about you, you will seek expedients, protection, and you will find nothing. We are relatives of M. de Chauvelin, and how do you think the King takes vengeance on such as we? The rack for Damiens, exile for the Parliament, but for us a word is enough, or, worse still,—silence. Do you know what the silence of the King is, when, instead of replying to you, he mutely stares at you, as he passes, and annihilates you? After the Grève, and the Bastille, this is a degree of torture which, though less cruel in appearance, leaves its mark as plainly as the hand of the executioner. The condemned man, it is true, remains free, but he must no longer think of approaching woman or courtier, drawing-room, abbey, or barrack. As he moves about every door closes upon him, every one who is anybody turns away, and thus he walks this way and that, in an invisible prison.”

“But I will so bestir myself in my prison that I shall get out of it.”

“No more than any one else! The son of M. de Meynières was no more to blame than you. Like you, he had received promises, he entertained most legitimate hopes. His father, a devoted subject of his Majesty, an upright man if there is one in the kingdom,

repulsed by his sovereign, bowed his gray head before the *grisette*, not in prayer, but in ardent pleading. Do you know what she replied? Here are her very words, which M. de Meynières sends me in a letter,—‘The King is the master, he does not deem it appropriate to signify his displeasure to you personally; he is content to make you aware of it by depriving your son of a calling. To punish you otherwise would be to begin an unpleasantness, and he wishes for none; we must respect his will. I pity you, however, I realize your troubles. I have been a mother; I know what it must cost you to leave your son without a profession!’ This is how the creature expresses herself; and you wish to put yourself at her feet!”

“They say they are charming, sir.”

“Of course they say so. She is not pretty, and the King does not love her, as every one knows. He yields, he bends before this woman. She *must* have something else than that wooden head of hers to maintain her strange power.”

“But they say she has so much wit.”

“And no heart!—Much to her credit, no doubt.”

“No heart! She who knows so well how to declaim the lines of Voltaire, how to sing

the music of Rousseau ! She who plays Alzire and Colette ! No heart ! Oh, that cannot be ! I will never believe it."

"Go then and see, since you wish it. I advise, I do not command, but you will only be at the expense of a useless journey.—You love this d'Annebault young lady very much then ?"

"More than my life."

"*Alors*, be off !"

III.

It has been said that journeys injure love, because they distract the mind ; it has also been said that they strengthen love, because they give one time to dream over it. The chevalier was too young to make such nice distinctions. Weary of the carriage, when half-way on his journey, he had taken a saddle-hack and thus arrived towards five o'clock in the evening at the "Sun" Inn—a sign then out of fashion, since it dated back to the time of Louis XIV.

There was, at Versailles, an old priest who had been rector of a church near Neauflette ; the chevalier knew him and loved him. This curé, poor and simple himself, had a nephew, who held a benefice, a court abbé, who might therefore be useful. So the chevalier went

to this nephew who—man of importance as he was,—his chin ensconced in his “rabat,” received the new-comer civilly, and condescended to listen to his request.

“Come !” said he, “you arrive at a fortunate moment. This is to be an opera-night at the court, some sort of fête or other. I am not going, because I am sulking so as to get something out of the marquise ; but here I happen to have a note from the Duc d’Aumont ; I asked for it for some one else, but never mind, you can have it. Go to the fête ; you have not yet been presented, it is true, but, for this entertainment, that is not necessary. Try to be in the King’s way when he goes into the little *foyer*. One look, and your fortune is made.”

The chevalier thanked the abbé, and, worn out by a disturbed night and a day on horse-back, he made his toilet at the inn in that negligent manner which so well becomes a lover. A maid-servant, whose experience had been decidedly limited, dressed his wig as best she could, covering his spangled coat with powder. Thus he turned his steps towards his luck with the hopeful courage of twenty summers.

The night was falling when he arrived at the château. He timidly advanced to the

gate and asked his way of a sentry. He was shown the grand staircase. There, he was informed by the tall Swiss that the opera had just commenced, and that the King, that is to say, everybody, was in the hall.*

"If Monsieur le Marquis will cross the court," added the doorkeeper (he conferred the title of "Marquis" at a venture), "he will be at the play in an instant. If he prefers to go through the apartments—"

The chevalier was not acquainted with the palace. Curiosity prompted him, at first, to reply that he would cross the apartments; then, as a lackey offered to follow as a guide, an impulse of vanity made him add that he needed no escort. He, therefore, went forward alone, but not without a certain emotion of timidity.

Versailles was resplendent with light. From the ground-floor to the roof there glittered and blazed lustres, chandeliers,

* This does not refer to the present theatre, built by Louis XV., or rather by Madame de Pompadour, but only completed in 1769 and inaugurated in 1770, for the marriage of the Duc de Berri (Louis XVI.) with Marie Antoinette. The "hall" in question was a sort of portable theatre, that was moved into this or that gallery or apartment, after the manner in vogue in the days of Louis XIV.

gilded furniture, marbles. With the exception of the Queen's apartment, the doors were everywhere thrown open. As the chevalier walked on he was struck with an astonishment and an admiration better imagined than described, for the wonder of the spectacle that offered itself to his gaze was not only the beauty, the sparkle of the display itself, but the absolute solitude which surrounded him in this enchanted wilderness.

To find one's self alone in a vast enclosure, be it temple, cloister, or castle, produces a strange, even a weird feeling. The monument—whatever it be—seems to weigh upon the solitary individual ; its walls gaze at him ; its echoes are listening to him ; the noise of his steps breaks in upon a silence so deep that he is impressed by an involuntary fear and dares not advance without a feeling akin to awe. Such were the chevalier's first impressions, but curiosity soon got the upper hand and drew him on. The candelabra of the Gallery of Mirrors, looking into the polished surfaces, saw their flames redoubled in them. Every one knows what countless thousands of cherubs, nymphs, and shepherdesses disport themselves on the panellings, flutter about on the ceilings, and seem to encircle the entire palace as with an immense garland.

Here, vast halls, with canopies of velvet shot with gold and chairs of state still impressed with the stiff majesty of the "great King"; there, creased and disordered ottomans, chairs in confusion around a card-table; a never-ending succession of empty salons, where all this magnificence shone out the more that it seemed entirely useless. At intervals were half-concealed doors opening upon corridors that extended as far as the eye could reach, a thousand staircases, a thousand passages crossing each other as in a labyrinth; colonnades, raised platforms built for giants, boudoirs ensconced in corners like children's hiding-places, an enormous painting of Vanloo near a mantel of porphyry; a forgotten patch-box, lying beside a piece of grotesque Chinese workmanship; here a crushing grandeur, there an effeminate grace; and everywhere, in the midst of luxury, of prodigality, and of indolence, a thousand intoxicating odors, strange and diverse, mingled perfumes of flowers and women, an enervating warmth, the very material and sensible atmosphere of pleasure itself.

To be in such a place, amid such marvels, at twenty, and to be there alone, is surely quite sufficient cause for temporary intoxi-

cation. The chevalier advanced at hazard, as in a dream.

"A very palace of fairies," he murmured, and, indeed, he seemed to behold, unfolding itself before him, one of those tales in which wandering knights discover enchanted castles. Were they indeed mortal creatures that inhabited this matchless abode? Were they real women who came and sat on these chairs and whose graceful outlines had left on those cushions that slight impress, so suggestive, even yet, of indolence? Who knows but that, behind those thick curtains, at the end of some long dazzling gallery, there may perhaps soon appear a princess asleep for the last hundred years, a fairy in hoops, an Armida in spangles, or some court hamadryad that shall issue forth from this marble column, or burst from out of that gilded panel?

Bewildered, almost overpowered, at the sight of all these novel objects, the young chevalier, in order the better to indulge his reverie, had thrown himself on a sofa, and would doubtless have forgotten himself there for some time had he not remembered that he was in love. What, at this hour, was Mademoiselle d'Annebault, his beloved, doing—left behind in her old château?

"Athénaïs!" he exclaimed suddenly, "Why

do I thus waste my time here? Is my mind wandering? Great heavens! Where am I? And what is going on within me?"

He soon rose and continued his travels through this *terra incognita*, and of course lost his way. Two or three lackeys, speaking in a low voice, stood before him at the end of a gallery. He walked towards them and asked how he should find his way to the play.

"If M. le Marquis," he was answered (the same title being still benevolently granted him) "will give himself the trouble to go down that staircase and follow the gallery on the right, he will find at the end of it three steps going up; he will then turn to the left, go through the Diana salon, that of Apollo, that of the Muses, and that of Spring; he will go down six steps more, then, leaving the Guards' Hall on his right and crossing over to the Ministers' staircase, he will not fail to meet there other ushers who will show him the way."

"Much obliged," said the chevalier, "with such excellent instruction, it will certainly be my fault if I do not find my way."

He set off again boldly, constantly stopping, however, in spite of himself, to look from side to side, then once more remembering his love. At last, at the end of a full

quarter of an hour, he once more found, as he had been told, a group of lackeys.

"M. le Marquis is mistaken," they informed him; "it is through the other wing of the château that he should have gone, but nothing is easier for him than to retrace his steps. M. le Marquis has but to go down this staircase, then he will cross the salon of the Nymphs, that of Summer, that of—"

"I thank you," said the chevalier, proceeding on his way. "How foolish I am," he thought, "to go on asking people in this fashion like a rustic. I am making myself ridiculous to no purpose, and even supposing—though it is not likely—that they are not laughing at me, of what use is their list of names, and the pompous sobriquets of these salons, not one of which I know?"

He made up his mind to go straight before him as far as possible; "For, after all," said he to himself, "this palace is very beautiful and prodigiously vast, but it is not boundless, and, were it three times as large as our rabbit-enclosure, I must at last reach the end of it."

But it is not easy in Versailles to walk on for a long time in one direction, and this rustic comparison of the royal dwelling to a rabbit-enclosure doubtless displeased the nymphs of the place, for they at once set

about leading the poor lover astray more than ever, and, doubtless, to punish him, took pleasure in making him retrace his steps over and over again, constantly bringing him back to the same place, like a countryman lost in a thicket of quickset ; thus did they shut him in in this Cretan labyrinth of marble and gold.

In the "Antiquities of Rome," by Piranesi, there is a series of engravings which the artist calls "his dreams," and which are supposed to reproduce his own visions during a fit of delirious fever. These engravings represent vast Gothic halls ; on the flagstones are strewn all sorts of engines and machines, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, the expression of enormous power and formidable resistance. Along the walls you perceive a staircase, and upon this staircase, climbing, not without trouble, Piranesi himself. Follow the steps a little higher and they suddenly come to an end before an abyss. Whatever has happened to poor Piranesi, you think that he has, at any rate, reached the end of his labors, for he cannot take another step without falling ; but lift your eyes and you will see a second staircase rising in the air, and upon these stairs Piranesi again, again on the brink of a precipice.

Look now still higher, and another staircase still rises before you, and again poor Piranesi continuing his ascent, and so on, until the everlasting staircase and the everlasting Piranesi disappear together in the skies ; that is to say, in the border of the engraving.

This allegory, offspring of a nightmare, represents with a high degree of accuracy the tedium of useless labor and the species of vertigo which is brought on by impatience. The chevalier, wandering incessantly from salon to salon and from gallery to gallery, was at last seized with a fit of downright exasperation.

"Parbleu," said he, "but this is cruel ! After having been so charmed, so enraptured, so enthralled, to find myself alone in this cursed palace." (It was no longer a palace of fairies !) "I shall never be able to get out of it ! A plague upon the infatuation which inspired me with the idea of entering this place, like Prince Fortunatus with his boots of solid gold, instead of simply getting the first lackey I came across to take me to the play at once !"

The chevalier experienced this tardy feeling of repentance for his rashness at a moment when, like Piranesi, he was half-way

up a staircase, on a landing between three doors. Behind the middle one, he thought he heard a murmur so sweet, so light, so voluptuous, that he could not help listening. At the very instant when he was tremblingly advancing with the indiscreet intention of eavesdropping, this door swung open. A breath of air, balmy with a thousand perfumes, a torrent of light that rendered the very mirrors of the gallery lustreless struck him so suddenly that he perforce stepped back.

"Does Monsieur le Marquis wish to enter?" asked the usher who had opened the door.

"I wish to go to the play," replied the chevalier.

"It is just this moment over."

At the same time, a bevy of beautiful ladies, their complexions delicately tinted with white and carmine, escorted by lords, old and young, who led them, not by the arm, nor even by the hand, but by the tips of their fingers, began filing out from the Palace Theatre, taking great care to walk sideways, in order not to disarrange their hoops.

All of these brilliant people spoke in a low voice, with an air half grave half gay, a mixture of awe and respect.

"What can this be?" said the Chevalier, not guessing that chance had luckily brought him to the little *foyer*.

"The King is about to pass," replied the usher.

There is a kind of intrepidity which hesitates at nothing; it comes but too easily, it is the courage of vulgar people. Our young provincial, although he was reasonably brave, did not possess this faculty. At the mere words, "The King is about to pass," he stood motionless and almost terror-stricken.

King Louis XV., who when out hunting would ride on horseback a dozen leagues with ease, was, in other respects, as is known, royally indolent. He boasted, not without reason, that he was the first gentleman of France, and his mistresses used to tell him, not without truth, that he was the best built and the most handsome. It was something to remember to see him leave his chair, and deign to walk in person. When he crossed the *foyer*, with one arm laid, or rather stretched, on the shoulder of Monsieur d'Argenson, while his red heel glided over the polished floor (he had made his laziness the fashion) all whisperings ceased; the courtiers lowered their heads, not daring to bow outright, and the fine ladies, gently bending

their knees within the depths of their immense furbelows, ventured that coquettish good-night which our grandmothers called a curtsy, and which our century has replaced by the brutal English shake of the hand.

But the King paid attention to nothing, and saw only what pleased him. Alfieri, perhaps, was there, and it is he who thus describes, in his memoirs, his presentation at Versailles :

“I well knew that the king never spoke to strangers who were not of striking appearance ; all the same I could not brook the impassible and frowning demeanor of Louis XV. He scanned from head to foot the man who was being presented to him, and it looked as if he received no impression by so doing. It seems to me, however, that if one were to say to a giant, ‘Here is an ant I present to you,’ he would smile on looking at it, or perhaps say, ‘Oh ! what a little creature.’”

The taciturn monarch thus passed among these flowers of feminine loveliness, and all this court, alone in spite of the crowd. It did not require of the chevalier much reflection to understand that he had nothing to hope from the king, and that the recital of his love would obtain no success in that quarter.

“Unfortunate that I am !” thought he. “My father was but too well informed when he told me that within two steps of the king I should see an abyss between him and me. Were I to venture to ask for an audience, who would be my patron ? Who would present me ? There he is,—the absolute master, who can by a word change my destiny, assure my fortune, fulfill my desires. He is there before me ; were I to stretch out my hand I could touch his embroidered coat—and I feel myself further from him than if I were still buried in the depths of my native province ! Oh ! If I could only speak to him ! Only approach him ! Who will come to my help ?”

While the chevalier was in this unhappy state of mind he saw entering with an air of the utmost grace and delicacy a young and attractive woman, clad very simply in a white gown, without diamonds or embroideries and with a single rose in her hair. She gave her hand to a lord *tout à l'ambre*, as Voltaire expresses it, and spoke softly to him behind her fan. Now chance willed it that, in chatting, laughing, and gesticulating, this fan should slip from her and fall beneath a chair, immediately in front of the chevalier. He at once hurried to pick it up, and as in doing

so he had set one knee on the floor, the young lady appeared to him so charming that he presented her the fan without rising. She stopped, smiled and passed on, thanking him with a slight movement of the head, but at the look she had given the chevalier he felt his heart beat without knowing why. He was right. This young lady was *la petite d'Etioles*, as the malcontents still called her, while others in speaking of her said "la Marquise" in that reverent tone in which one says "The Queen."

IV.

"She will protect me ! She will come to my rescue ! Ah ! how truly the abbé spoke when he said that one look might decide my life. Yes, those eyes, so soft and gentle, that little mouth, both merry and sweet, that little foot almost hidden under the *pompon*—Yes, here is my good fairy !"

Thus thought the chevalier, almost aloud, as he returned to the inn. Whence came this sudden hope ? Did his youth alone speak, or had the eyes of the marquise told a tale ?

He passed the greater part of the night writing to Mademoiselle d'Annebault such a

letter as we heard read by Madame de Pompadour to her lord.

To reproduce this letter would be a vain task. Excepting idiots, lovers alone find no monotony in repeating the same thing over and over again.

At daybreak the chevalier went out and began roaming about, carrying his dreams through the streets. It did not occur to him to have recourse once more to the protecting abbé, and it would not be easy to tell the reason which prevented his doing so. It was like a blending of timidity and audacity, of false shame and romantic honor. And, indeed, what would the abbé have replied to him, if he had told his story of the night before? "You had the unique good fortune to pick up this fan; did you know how to profit by it? What did the marquise say to you?"

"Nothing."

"You should have spoken to her."

"I was confused; I had lost my head."

"That was wrong; one must know how to seize an opportunity; but this can be repaired. Would you like me to present you to Monsieur So-and-so, one of my friends; or perhaps to Madame Such-a-one? That would be still better. We will try and secure

for you access to this marquise who frightened you so, and then,"—and so forth.

Now the chevalier little relished anything of this kind. It seemed to him that, in telling his adventure, he would, so to speak, soil and mar it. He said to himself that chance had done for him something unheard of, incredible, and that it should remain a secret between himself and Fortune. To confide this secret to the first comer was, to his thinking, to rob it of its value, and to show himself unworthy of it. "I went alone yesterday to the castle at Versailles," thought he, "I can surely go alone to Trianon?" This was, at the time, the abode of the favorite.

Such a way of thinking might, and even should, appear extravagant to calculating minds, who neglect no detail, and leave as little as possible to chance ; but colder mortals, if they were ever young, and not everybody is so, even in youth, have known that strange sentiment, both weak and bold, dangerous and seductive, which drags us to our fate. One feels one's self blind, and wishes to be so ; one does not know where one is going and yet walks on. The charm of the thing consists in this recklessness and this very ignorance ; it is the pleasure of the

artist in his dreams, of the lover spending the night beneath the windows of his mistress ; it is the instinct of the soldier ; it is, above all, that of the gamester.

The chevalier, almost without knowing it, had thus taken his way to Trianon. Without being very *paré*, as they said in those days, he lacked neither elegance nor that indescribable air which forbids a chance lackey, meeting one, from daring to ask where one is going. It was, therefore, not difficult for him, thanks to information he had obtained at the inn, to reach the gate of the château, —if one can so call that marble *bonbonnière*, which has seen so many pleasures and pains in by-gone days. Unfortunately, the gate was closed, and a stout Swiss wearing a plain coat was walking about, his hands behind his back, in the inner avenue, like a person who is not expecting any one.

“The King is here !” said the chevalier to himself, “or else the marquise is away. Evidently, when the doors are closed, and valets stroll about, the masters are either shut in or gone out.”

What was to be done ? Full as he had been, a moment earlier, of courage and confidence, he now felt, all at once, confused and disappointed. The mere thought,

"The King is here!" alone gave him more alarm than those few words, on the night before: "The King is about to pass!" For then he was but facing the unknown, and now he knew that icy stare, that implacable, impassible majesty.

"Ah! Bon Dieu! What a figure I should cut if I were to be so mad as to try and penetrate this garden, and find myself face to face with this superb monarch, sipping his coffee beside a rivulet."

At once the sinister shadow of the Bastille seemed to fall before the poor lover; instead of the charming image that he had retained of the marquise and her smile, he saw dungeons, cells, black bread, questionable water; he knew the story of Latude, thirty years an inmate of the Bastille. Little by little his hope seemed to be taking to itself wings.

"And yet," he again said to himself, "I am doing no harm, nor the King either. I protest against an injustice; but I never wrote or sang scurrilous songs. I was so well received at Versailles yesterday, and the lackeys were so polite! What am I afraid of? Of committing a blunder? I shall make many more which will repair this one."

He approached the gate and touched it

with his finger. It was not quite closed. He opened it, and resolutely entered.

The gate-keeper turned round with a look of annoyance.

"What are you looking for? Where are you going?"

"I am going to Madame de Pompadour."

"Have you an audience?"

"Yes."

"Where is your letter?"

He was no longer the "marquis" of the night before, and, this time, there was no Duc d'Aumont. The chevalier lowered his eyes sadly, and noticed that his white stockings and Rhinestone buckles were covered with dust. He had made the mistake of coming on foot, in a region where no one walked. The gate-keeper also bent his eyes, and scanned him, not from head to foot, but from foot to head. The dress seemed neat enough, but the hat was rather askew, and the hair lacked powder.

"You have no letter. What do you wish?"

"I wish to speak to Madame de Pompadour."

"Really! And you think this is the way it is done?"

"I know nothing about it. Is the King here?"

"Perhaps. Go about your business and leave me alone."

The chevalier did not wish to lose his temper, but, in spite of himself, this insolence made him turn pale.

"I sometimes have told a lackey to go away," he replied, "but a lackey never said so to me."

"Lackey! I a lackey?" exclaimed the enraged gatekeeper.

"Lackey, doorkeeper, valet, or menial, I care not, and it matters little."

The gatekeeper made a step toward the chevalier with clenched fists and face aflame. The chevalier, brought to himself by the appearance of a threat, lifted the handle of his sword slightly.

"Take care, fellow," said he, "I am a gentleman, and it would cost me but thirty-six livres to put a boor like you under ground."

"If you are a nobleman, monsieur, I belong to the King; I am only doing my duty; so do not think—"

At this moment the flourish of a hunting-horn sounding from the Bois de Satory was heard afar, and lost itself in the echo. The chevalier allowed his sword to drop into its scabbard, no longer thinking of the interrupted quarrel.

"I declare," said he, "it is the King starting for the hunt! Why did you not tell me that before?"

"That has nothing to do with me, nor with you either."

"Listen to me, my good man. The King is not here; I have no letter, I have no audience. Here is some money for you; let me in."

He drew from his pocket several pieces of gold. The gatekeeper scanned him anew with a superb contempt.

"What is that?" said he, disdainfully. "Is it thus you seek to penetrate into a royal dwelling? Instead of making you go out, take care I don't lock you in."

"*You*,—you valet!" said the chevalier, getting angry again and once more seizing his sword.

"Yes, I," repeated the big man. But during this conversation, in which the historian regrets to have compromised his hero, thick clouds had darkened the sky; a storm was brewing. A flash of lightning burst forth, followed by a violent peal of thunder, and the rain began to fall heavily. The chevalier, who still held his gold, saw a drop of water on his dusty shoe as large as a crown piece.

"Peste!" said he, "let us find shelter. It would never do to get wet."

He turned nimbly towards the den of Cerberus, or, if you please, the gatekeeper's lodge. Once in there, he threw himself unceremoniously into the big arm-chair of the gatekeeper himself.

"Heavens! How you annoy me!" said he, "and how unfortunate I am! You take me for a conspirator, and you do not understand that I have in my pocket a petition for his Majesty! If I am from the country, you are nothing but a dolt."

The gatekeeper, for answer, went to a corner to fetch his halberd, and remained standing thus with the weapon in his fist.

"When are you going away?" he cried out in a stentorian voice.

The quarrel, in turn forgotten and taken up again, seemed this time to be becoming quite serious, and already the gatekeeper's two big hands trembled strangely on his pike;—what was to happen? I do not know. But, suddenly turning his head,—“Ah!” said the chevalier, “who comes here?”

A young page mounted on a splendid horse (not an English one;—at that time thin legs were not the fashion), came up at full speed. The road was soaked with rain; the gate was

but half open. There was a pause ; the keeper advanced and opened the gate. The page spurred his horse, which had stopped for the space of an instant ; it tried to resume its gait, but missed its footing, and, slipping on the damp ground, fell.

It is very awkward, almost dangerous, to raise a fallen horse. A riding-whip is of no use. The kicking of the beast, which is doing its best, is extremely disagreeable, especially when one's own leg is caught under the saddle.

The chevalier, however, came to the rescue without thinking of these inconveniences, and set about it so cleverly that the horse was soon raised and the rider freed. But the latter was covered with mud and could scarcely limp along.

Carried as well as might be to the gatekeeper's lodge and seated in his turn in the big arm-chair, "Sir," said he to the chevalier, "you are certainly a nobleman. You have rendered me a great service, but you can render me a still greater one. Here is a message from the King for Madame la Marquise, and this message is very urgent, as you see, since my horse and I, in order to go faster, almost broke our necks. You understand that, wounded as I am, with a lame leg, I could

not deliver this paper. I should have, in order to do so, to be carried myself. Will you go there in my stead?"

At the same time he drew from his pocket a large envelope ornamented with gilt arabesques and fastened with the royal seal.

"Very willingly, sir," replied the chevalier, taking the envelope. And, nimble and light as a feather, he set out at a run and on the tips of his toes.

V.

When the chevalier arrived at the château he found another doorkeeper in front of the peristyle:

"By the King's order," said the young man, who this time no longer feared halberds, and, showing his letter, he passed gaily between half a dozen lackeys.

A tall usher, planted in the middle of the vestibule, seeing the order and the royal seal, gravely inclined himself, like a poplar bent by the wind,—then, smiling, he touched with one of his bony fingers the corner of a piece of panelling.

A little swinging door, masked by tapestry, at once opened as if of its own accord. The bony man made an obsequious sign, the

chevalier entered, and the tapestry, which had been drawn apart, fell softly behind him.

A silent valet introduced him into a drawing-room, then into a corridor, in which there were two or three closed doors, then at last, into a second drawing-room, and begged him to wait a moment.

"Am I here again in the château of Versailles?" the chevalier asked himself. "Are we going to begin another game of hide-and-seek?"

Trianon was, at that time, neither what it is now nor what it had been. It has been said that Madame de Maintenon had made of Versailles an oratory, and Madame de Pompadour a boudoir. It has also been said of Trianon that *ce petit château de porcelaine* was the boudoir of Madame de Montespan. Be that as it may, concerning these boudoirs, it appears that Louis XV. put them everywhere. This or that gallery, which his ancestor walked majestically, was then divided oddly into an infinity of apartments. There were some of every color, and the King went fluttering about in all these gardens of silk and velvet.

"Do you think my little furnished apartments are in good taste?" he one day asked the beautiful Comtesse de Sérrant.

"No," said she, "I would have them in blue."

As blue was the King's color, this answer flattered him.

At their next meeting, Madame de Sérrant found the salon upholstered in blue, as she had wished it.

That in which the chevalier now found himself alone was neither blue nor pink, it was all mirrors. We know how much a pretty woman with a lovely figure gains by letting her image repeat itself in a thousand aspects. She bewilders, she envelops, so to speak, him whom she desires to please. To whatever side he turns, he sees her. How can he avoid being charmed? He must either take to flight or own himself conquered.

The chevalier looked at the garden, too. There, behind, the bushes and labyrinths, the statues and the marble vases, that pastoral style which the marquise was about to introduce, and which, later on, Madame Dubarry and Marie Antoinette were to push to such a high degree of perfection, was beginning to show itself. Already there appeared the rural fantasies where the *blasé* conceits were disappearing. Already the puffing tritons, the grave goddesses and the learned nymphs, the busts with flowing wigs, frozen

with horror in their wealth of verdure, beheld an English garden rise from the ground, amid the wondering trees. Little lawns, little streams, little bridges, were soon to dethrone Olympus to replace it by a dairy,—strange parody of nature, which the English copy without understanding,—very child's play, for the nonce the pastime of an indolent master who tried in vain to escape the ennui of Versailles while remaining at Versailles itself.

But the chevalier was too charmed, too enraptured at finding himself there for a critical thought to present itself to his mind. He was, on the contrary, ready to admire everything, and was indeed admiring, twirling his missive between his fingers as a rustic does his hat, when a pretty waiting-maid opened the door, and said to him softly:

“Come, monsieur.”

He followed her, and after having once more passed through several corridors which were more or less mysterious, she ushered him into a large apartment where the shutters were half-closed. Here, she stopped and seemed to listen.

“Still at hide-and-seek!” said the chevalier to himself. However, at the end of a few moments, yet another door opened, and another waiting-maid, who seemed to be even

prettier than the first, repeated to him in the same tone the same words :

“Come, monsieur.”

If he had been the victim of one kind of emotion at Versailles, he was subject to another, and still deeper feeling now, for he stood on the threshold of the temple in which the divinity dwelt. He advanced with a palpitating heart. A soft light, slightly veiled by thin, gauze curtains, succeeded obscurity ; a delicious perfume, almost imperceptible, pervaded the air around him ; the waiting-maid timidly drew back the corner of a silk portière, and, at the end of a large chamber furnished with elegant simplicity, he beheld the lady of the fan,—the all-powerful marquise.

She was alone, seated before a table, wrapped in a dressing-gown, her head resting on her hand, and, seemingly, deeply preoccupied. On seeing the chevalier enter, she rose with a sudden and apparently involuntary movement.

“You come on behalf of the King?”

The chevalier might have answered, but he could think of nothing better than to bow profoundly while presenting to the marquise the letter which he brought her. She took it, or rather seized upon it, with extreme

eagerness. Her hands trembled on the envelope as she broke the seal.

This letter, written by the King's hand, was rather long. She devoured it at first, so to speak, with a glance, then she read it greedily, with profound attention, with wrinkled brow and tightened lips. She was not beautiful thus, and no longer resembled the magic apparition of the *petit foyer*. When she reached the end, she seemed to reflect. Little by little her face, which had turned pale, assumed a faint color (at this hour she did not wear rouge), and not only did she regain that graceful air which habitually belonged to her, but a gleam of real beauty illumined her delicate features; one might have taken her cheeks for two rose-leaves. She heaved a little sigh, allowed the letter to fall upon the table, and, turning towards the chevalier, said, with the most charming smile:

"I kept you waiting, monsieur, but I was not yet dressed, and, indeed, am hardly so even now. That is why I was forced to get you to come through the private rooms, for I am almost as much besieged here as though I were at home. I would like to answer the King's note. Would it be too much trouble to you to do an errand for me?"

This time he *must* speak ; the chevalier had had time to regain a little courage :

"Alas ! madame," said he, sadly, "you confer a great favor on me, but, unfortunately, I can not profit by it."

"Why not ?"

"I have not the honor to belong to his Majesty."

"How, then, did you come here ?"

"By chance ; I met on my way a page who had been thrown and who begged me—"

"How 'thrown' ?" repeated the marquise, bursting out laughing. She seemed so happy at this moment, that gaiety came to her without an effort.

"Yes, madame, he fell from his horse at the gate. I luckily found myself there to help him to rise, and, as his dress was very much disordered, he begged me to take charge of his message."

"And by what chance did you find yourself there ?"

"Madame, it was because I had a petition to present to his Majesty."

"His Majesty lives at Versailles."

"Yes, but you live here."

"Oh ! So it is you who wished to entrust me with a message."

"Madame, I beg you to believe—"

"Do not trouble yourself, you are not the first. But why do you address yourself to me? I am but a woman—like any other."

As she uttered these words with a somewhat ironical air, the marquise threw a triumphant look upon the letter she had just read.

"Madame," continued the chevalier, "I have always heard that men exercise power, and that women—"

"Guide it, eh? Well, monsieur, there is a queen of France."

"I know it, madame; that is how it happened that I found myself *here* this morning."

The marquise was more than accustomed to such compliments, though they were generally made in a whisper; but, in the present circumstances, this appeared to be quite singularly gratifying to her.

"And on what faith," said she, "on what assurance, did you believe yourself able to penetrate as far as this? For you did not count, I suppose, upon a horse's falling on the way."

"Madame, I believed—I hoped—"

"What did you hope?"

"I hoped that chance,—might make—"

"Chance again! Chance is apparently one of your friends; but I warn you that

if you have no other, it is a sad recommendation."

Perhaps offended Chance wished to avenge herself for this irreverence, for the chevalier, whom these few questions had more and more troubled, suddenly perceived, on the corner of the table, the identical fan that he had picked up the night before. He took it, and, as on the night before, presented it to the marquise, bending the knee before her.

"Here, madame," he said to her, "is the only friend that could plead for me—"

The marquise seemed at first astonished, and hesitated a moment, looking now at the fan, now at the chevalier.

"Ah! you are right," she said at last, "it is you, monsieur! I recognize you. It is you whom I saw yesterday, after the play, as I went by with M. de Richelieu. I let my fan drop, and you 'found yourself there,' as you were saying."

"Yes, madame."

"And very gallantly, as a true chevalier, you returned it to me. I did not thank you, but I was sure, all the same, that he who knows how to pick up a fan with such grace would also know, at the right time, how to pick up the glove. And we are not ill-pleased at that, we women."

"And it is but too true, madame ; for, on reaching here just now, I almost had a duel with the gatekeeper."

"Mercy on us !" said the marquise, once more seized with a fit of gaiety. "With the gatekeeper ! And what about ?"

"He would not let me come in."

"That would have been a pity ! But who are you, monsieur ? And what is your request ?"

"Madame, I am called the Chevalier de Vauvert. M. de Biron had asked in my behalf for a cornetcy in the Guards."

"Oh ! I remember now. You come from Neauflette ; you are in love with Mademoiselle d'Annebault—"

"Madame, who could have told you ?"

"Oh ! I warn you that I am much to be feared. When memory fails me, I guess. You are a relative of the Abbé de Chauvelin, and were refused on that account ; is not that so ? Where is your petition ?"

"Here it is, madame ; but indeed I cannot understand—"

"Why need you understand ? Rise and lay your paper on the table. I am going to answer the King's letter ; you will take him, at the same time, your request and my letter."

"But, madame, I thought I had mentioned to you—"

"You will go. You entered here on the business of the King, is not that true? Well, then, you will enter there on the business of the Marquise de Pompadour, lady of the palace to the Queen."

The chevalier bowed without a word, seized with a sort of stupefaction. The world had long known how much talk, how many ruses and intrigues, the favorite had brought to bear, and what obstinacy she had shown to obtain this title, which in reality brought her nothing but a cruel affront from the Dauphin. She had longed for it for ten years; she willed it, and she had succeeded. So M. de Vauvert, whom she did not know, although she knew of his love, pleased her as a bearer of happy news.

Immovable, standing behind her, the chevalier watched the marquise as she wrote, first, with all her heart,—with passion,—then with reflection, stopping, passing her hand under her little nose, delicate as amber. She grew impatient: the presence of a witness disturbed her. At last she made up her mind and drew her pen through something; it must be owned that after all it was but a rough draft.

Opposite the chevalier, on the other side of the table, there glittered a fine Venetian mirror. This timid messenger hardly dared raise his eyes. It would, however, have been difficult not to see in this mirror, over the head of the marquise, the anxious and charming face of the new lady of the palace.

"How pretty she is!" thought he; "it is a pity that I am in love with somebody else; but Athénaïs is more beautiful, and moreover it would be on my part such a horrible disloyalty."

"What are you talking about?" said the marquise. The chevalier, as was his wont, had thought aloud without knowing it. "What are you saying?"

"I, madame? I am waiting."

"There; that is done," the marquise went on, taking another sheet of paper; but at the slight movement she had made in turning around the dressing-gown had slipped on her shoulder.

Fashion is a strange thing. Our grandmothers thought nothing of going to court in immense robes exposing almost the entire bosom, and it was by no means considered indecent; but they carefully hid the back of their necks, which the fine ladies of to-day ex-

pose so freely in the balcony of the opera. This is a newly invented beauty.

On the frail, white, dainty shoulder of Madame de Pompadour there was a little black mark that looked like a fly floating in milk. The chevalier, serious as a giddy boy who is trying to keep his countenance, looked at the mark, and the marquise, holding her pen in the air, looked at the chevalier in the mirror.

In that mirror a rapid glance was exchanged, which meant to say on the one side, "You are charming," and on the other, "I am not sorry for it."

However, the marquise readjusted her dressing-gown.

"You are looking at my beauty-spot?"

"I am not looking, madame ; I see and I admire."

"Here is my letter ; take it to the King with your petition."

"But, madame—"

"Well?"

"His Majesty is hunting ; I have just heard the horn in the wood of Satory."

"That is true. I did not think of it. Well, to-morrow. The day after ; it matters little. No, immediately. Go. You will give that to Lebel. Good-bye, monsieur. Try and remember the beauty-spot you have just seen ;

the King alone in the whole kingdom has seen it; and as for your friend, Chance, tell her, I beg of you, to take care and not chatter to herself so loud, as she did just now. Farewell, chevalier."

She touched a little bell, then, lifting a flood of laces upon her sleeve, held out to the young man her bare arm. He once more bent low, and with the tips of his lips scarcely brushed the rosy nails of the marquise. She saw no impoliteness in it,—far from it—but, perhaps, a little too much modesty.

At once the little waiting-maids reappeared (the big ones were not yet up), and, standing behind them, like a steeple in the middle of a flock of sheep, the bony man, still smiling, was pointing the way.

VI.

Alone, ensconced in an old arm-chair in the back of his little room at the sign of "the Sun," the chevalier waited the next day, then the next, and no news!

"Singular woman! Gentle and imperious, good and bad, the most frivolous of women, and the most obstinate! She has forgotten me. What misery! She is right;—she is all-powerful, and I am nothing."

He had risen, and was walking about the room.

"Nothing!—no, I am but a poor devil. How truly my father spoke! The marquise was mocking me; that is all; while I was looking at her, it was only the reflection in that mirror, and in my eyes, of her own charms,—which are, certainly, incomparable,—that made her look so pleased! Yes, her eyes are small, but what grace! And Latour, before Diderot, has taken the dust from a butterfly's wing to paint her portrait. She is not very tall, but her figure is perfectly exquisite. Ah! Mademoiselle d'Annebault! Ah! my beloved friend, is it possible that I, too, should forget?"

Two or three sharp raps at the door awoke him from his grief.

"Who is there?"

The bony man, clad all in black, with a splendid pair of silk stockings, which simulated calves that were lacking, entered, and made a deep bow.

"This evening, Monsieur le Chevalier, there is to be a masked ball at the court, and Madame la Marquise sends me to say that you are invited."

"That is enough, monsieur. Many thanks."

As soon as the bony man had retired, the chevalier ran to the bell ; the same maid-servant who, three days before, had done her best to be of service to him, assisted him to put on the same spangled coat, striving to acquit herself even better than before.

And then, the young man took his way towards the palace, invited this time, and more quiet outwardly, but more anxious and less bold than when he had made his first steps in that, to him, still unknown world.

VII.

Bewildered, almost as much as on the former occasion, by all the splendors of Versailles, which this evening was not empty, the chevalier walked in the great gallery, looking on every side and doing all he could to learn why he was there ; but nobody seemed to think of accosting him. At the end of an hour he became wearied and was about to leave, when two masks, exactly alike, seated on a bench, stopped him on his way. One of them took aim at him with her finger as if with a pistol ; the other rose and went to him :

"It appears, monsieur," said the mask, carelessly taking his arm, "that you are on very good terms with our marquise."

"I beg your pardon, madame, but of whom are you speaking?"

"You know well enough."

"Not the least in the world."

"Oh! but indeed you do."

"Not at all."

"All the court knows it."

"I do not belong to the court."

"You are playing the child. I tell you it is well known!"

"That may be, madame, but I am ignorant of it."

"You are not ignorant, however, of the fact that the day before yesterday a page fell from his horse at the gate of Trianon. Were you not there by chance?"

"Yes, madame."

"Did you not help him to rise?"

"Yes, madame."

"And did not you enter the château?"

"Certainly."

"And was not a paper given to you?"

"Yes, madame."

"And did you not take it to the King?"

"Assuredly."

"The King was not at Trianon; he was hunting; the marquise was alone—Is not that so?"

"Yes, madame."

"She had just risen ; she was scarcely clad, excepting, as it is rumored, in a wide dressing-gown."

"People whom one cannot prevent from speaking tell all that runs through their heads."

"That is all well enough, but it appears that there passed between your eyes and hers a look which did not offend her."

"What do you mean by that, madame?"

"That you did not displease her."

"I know nothing about that, and I should be distressed that such sweet and rare goodwill, which I did not expect, and which touched me to the bottom of my heart, should give occasion to any idle speeches."

"You take fire too quickly, chevalier ; one would think that you were challenging the whole court ; you would never succeed in killing so many people."

"But, madame, if the page fell, and if I carried his message—Allow me to ask you why I am interrogated."

The mask pressed his arm and said to him :

"Listen, monsieur."

"As much as you please, madame."

"This is what we are thinking about now : The King no longer loves the marquise, and nobody believes that he ever loved her. She

has just committed an imprudence ; she has set the whole parliament against her with her "two sous" tax, and to-day she dares attack a far greater power,—the Society of Jesuits. She will fail, but she has weapons, and, before perishing, she will defend herself."

"Well, madame, what can I do?"

"I will tell you. M. de Choiseul has half quarrelled with M. de Bernis ; neither of them is sure what it is he would like to attempt. Bernis is going away ; Choiseul will take his place. A word from you can decide it."

"In what way, madame, pray?"

"By allowing your story of the other day to be told."

"What earthly connection can there be between my visit, the Jesuits, and the parliament?"

"Write me one word and the marquise is lost. And do not doubt that the warmest interest, the most complete gratitude—"

"I humbly beg your pardon again, madame, but what you are asking of me there would be an act of cowardice."

"Is there any honor in politics?"

"I know nothing of all that. Madame de Pompadour let her fan fall before me ; I picked it up ; I gave it back to her ; she

thanked me ; she permitted me with that peculiar grace of hers to thank her in my turn."

"A truce to ceremonies : time flies ; my name is the Countess d'Estrades ; you love Mademoiselle d'Annebault, my niece ; do not say no, it is useless. You are seeking a cornetcy ; you shall have it to-morrow, and if you care for Athénaïs you will soon be my nephew."

"Ah ! madame, what excess of goodness !"

"But you must speak."

"No, madame."

"I have been told that you love that little girl."

"As much as it is possible to love ; but if ever my love is to declare itself in her presence my honor must also be there."

"You are very obstinate, chevalier ! Is that your final reply ?"

"It is the last, as it was the first."

"You refuse to enter the Guards ? You refuse the hand of my niece ?"

"Yes, madame, if that be the price."

Madame d'Estrades cast upon the chevalier a piercing look, full of curiosity ; then seeing in his face no sign of hesitation she slowly walked away, losing herself in the crowd.

The chevalier, unable to make anything

of this singular adventure, went and sat down in a corner of the gallery.

"What does that woman mean to do?" said he to himself. "She must be a little mad. She wishes to upset the state by means of a silly calumny, and she proposes to me that in order to merit the hand of her niece I should dishonor myself. But Athénaïs would no longer care for me, or, if she lent herself to such an intrigue, I would no longer care for her. What! Strive to harm this good marquise, to defame her, to blacken her character. Never! no, never!"

Always intent upon his own thoughts, the chevalier very probably would have risen and spoken aloud, but just then a small rosy finger touched him on the shoulder.

He raised his eyes and saw before him the pair of masks who had stopped him.

"You do not wish to help us a little then?" said one of the masks, disguising her voice. But although the two costumes were exactly alike, and all seemed calculated to mislead, the chevalier was not deceived. Neither the look nor the tone was the same.

"Will you answer, sir?"

"No, madame."

"Will you write?"

"Neither will I write."

"It is true that you are obstinate. Good-night, lieutenant."

"What do you say, madame?"

"There is your commission and your marriage contract." And she threw the fan to him.

It was the one which the chevalier had already twice picked up. The little cupids of Boucher sported on the parchment of the gilded mother-of-pearl master-piece. There was no longer any doubt, it was the fan of Madame de Pompadour.

"Heavens! Marquise, is it possible?"

"Very possible," said she, raising the little piece of black veil on her chin.

"I know, madame, how to answer—"

"It is not necessary. You are a loyal gentleman, and we shall see each other again, for we are to be in the same house. The King has placed you in the 'cornette blanche.' Remember, that for a petitioner there is no greater eloquence than to know how to be silent if need be—"

"And forgive us," added she, laughing as she ran away, "if before bestowing upon you our niece's hand, we thought it expedient to find out your true worth." *

* Madame d'Estrades not long after was disgraced, together with M. d'Argenson, for having conspired, this time seriously, against Madame de Pompadour.



CROISILLES



CROISILLES.

I.

AT the beginning of the reign of Louis XV., a young man named Croisilles, son of a goldsmith, was returning from Paris to Havre, his native town. He had been intrusted by his father with the transaction of some business, and his trip to the great city having turned out satisfactorily, the joy of bringing good news caused him to walk the sixty leagues more gaily and briskly than his wont ; for, though he had a rather large sum of money in his pocket, he travelled on foot for pleasure. He was a good-tempered fellow, and not without wit, but so very thoughtless and flighty that people looked upon him as being rather weak-minded. His doublet buttoned awry, his periwig flying to the wind, his hat under his arm, he followed the banks of the Seine, at times finding enjoyment in his own thoughts and again indulging in snatches of song ; up at daybreak, supping at wayside inns, and always charmed with this

stroll of his through one of the most beautiful regions of France. Plundering the apple-trees of Normandy on his way, he puzzled his brain to find rhymes (for all these rattle-pates are more or less poets), and tried hard to turn out a madrigal for a certain fair damsel of his native place. She was no less than a daughter of a *fermier-général*, Mademoiselle Godeau, the pearl of Havre, a rich heiress, and much courted. Croisilles was not received at M. Godeau's otherwise than in a casual sort of way, that is to say, he had sometimes himself taken there articles of jewelry purchased at his father's. M. Godeau, whose somewhat vulgar surname ill-fitted his immense fortune, avenged himself by his arrogance for the stigma of his birth, and showed himself on all occasions enormously and pitilessly rich. He certainly was not the man to allow the son of a goldsmith to enter his drawing-room; but, as Mademoiselle Godeau had the most beautiful eyes in the world, and Croisilles was not ill-favored; and as nothing can prevent a fine fellow from falling in love with a pretty girl, Croisilles adored Mademoiselle Godeau, who did not seem vexed thereat. Thus was he thinking of her as he turned his steps toward Havre; and, as he had never reflected seri-

ously upon anything, instead of thinking of the invincible obstacles which separated him from his lady-love, he busied himself only with finding a rhyme for the Christian name she bore. Mademoiselle Godeau was called Julie, and the rhyme was found easily enough. So Croisilles, having reached Honfleur, embarked with a satisfied heart, his money and his madrigal in his pocket, and as soon as he jumped ashore ran to the paternal house.

He found the shop closed, and knocked again and again, not without astonishment and apprehension, for it was not a holiday ; but nobody came. He called his father, but in vain. He went to a neighbor's to ask what had happened ; instead of replying, the neighbor turned away, as though not wishing to recognize him. Croisilles repeated his questions ; he learned that his father, his affairs having long been in an embarrassed condition, had just become bankrupt, and had fled to America, abandoning to his creditors all that he possessed.

Not realizing as yet the extent of his misfortune, Croisilles felt overwhelmed by the thought that he might never again see his father. It seemed to him incredible that he should be thus suddenly abandoned ; he

tried to force an entrance into the store ; but was given to understand that the official seals had been affixed ; so he sat down on a stone, and giving way to his grief, began to weep piteously, deaf to the consolations of those around him, never ceasing to call his father's name, though he knew him to be already far away. At last he rose, ashamed at seeing a crowd about him, and, in the most profound despair, turned his steps towards the harbor.

On reaching the pier, he walked straight before him like a man in a trance, who knows neither where he is going, nor what is to become of him. He saw himself irretrievably lost, possessing no longer a shelter, no means of rescue and, of course, no longer any friends. Alone, wandering on the seashore, he felt tempted to drown himself, then and there. Just at the moment when, yielding to this thought, he was advancing to the edge of a high cliff, an old servant named Jean, who had served his family for a number of years, arrived on the scene.

"Ah ! my poor Jean !" he exclaimed, "you know all that has happened since I went away. Is it possible that my father could leave us without warning, without farewell ? "

"He is gone," answered Jean, "but indeed not without saying good-bye to you."

At the same time he drew from his pocket a letter, which he gave to his young master. Croisilles recognized the handwriting of his father, and, before opening the letter, kissed it rapturously ; but it contained only a few words. Instead of feeling his trouble softened, it seemed to the young man still harder to bear. Honorable until then, and known as such, the old gentleman, ruined by an unforeseen disaster (the bankruptcy of a partner), had left for his son nothing but a few commonplace words of consolation, and no hope, except, perhaps, that vague hope, without aim or reason, which constitutes, it is said, the last possession one loses.

"Jean, my friend, you carried me in your arms," said Croisilles, when he had read the letter, "and you certainly are to-day the only being who loves me at all ; it is a very sweet thing to me, but a very sad one for you ; for, as sure as my father embarked there, I will throw myself into the same sea which is bearing him away ; not before you, nor at once, but some day I will do it, for I am lost."

"What can you do ?" replied Jean, not seeming to have understood, but holding fast

to the skirt of Croisilles' coat ; " What can you do, my dear master ? Your father was deceived ; he was expecting money which did not come, and it was no small amount either. Could he stay here ? I have seen him, sir, as he made his fortune, during the thirty years that I served him ; I have seen him working, attending to his business, the crown-pieces coming in one by one. He was an honorable man, and skilful ; they took a cruel advantage of him. Within the last few days, I was still there, and as fast as the crowns came in, I saw them go out of the shop again. Your father paid all he could, for a whole day, and, when his desk was empty, he could not help telling me, pointing to a drawer where but six francs remained : ' There were a hundred thousand francs there this morning ! ' That does not look like a rascally failure, sir ? There is nothing in it that can dishonor you."

" I have no more doubt of my father's integrity," answered Croisilles, " than I have of his misfortune. Neither do I doubt his affection. But I wish I could have kissed him, for what is to become of me ? I am not accustomed to poverty, I have not the necessary cleverness to build up my fortune. And, if I had it, my father is gone. It took him

thirty years, how long would it take me to repair this disaster? Much longer. And will he be living then? Certainly not; he will die over there, and I cannot even go and find him; I can join him only by dying."

Utterly distressed as Croisilles was, he possessed much religious feeling. Although his despondency made him wish for death, he hesitated to take his life. At the first words of this interview, he had taken hold of old Jean's arm, and thus both returned to the town. When they had entered the streets and the sea was no longer so near:

"It seems to me, sir," said Jean, "that a good man has a right to live and that a misfortune proves nothing. Since your father has not killed himself, thank God, how can you think of dying? Since there is no dishonor in his case, and all the town knows it is so, what would they think of you? That you felt unable to endure poverty. It would be neither brave nor Christian; for, at the very worst, what is there to frighten you? There are plenty of people born poor, and who have never had either mother or father to help them on. I know that we are not all alike, but, after all, nothing is impossible to God. What would you do in such a case? Your father was not born rich, far from it,—

meaning no offence—and that is perhaps what consoles him now. If you had been here, this last month, it would have given you courage. Yes, sir, a man may be ruined, nobody is secure from bankruptcy ; but your father, I make bold to say, has borne himself, through it all, like a man, though he did leave us so hastily. But what could he do ? It is not every day that a vessel starts for America. I accompanied him to the wharf, and if you had seen how sad he was ! How he charged me to take care of you ; to send him news from you !—Sir, it is a right poor idea you have, that throwing the helve after the hatchet. Every one has his time of trial in this world, and I was a soldier before I was a servant. I suffered severely at the time, but I was young ; I was of your age, sir, and it seemed to me that Providence could not have spoken His last word to a young man of twenty-five. Why do you wish to prevent the kind God from repairing the evil that has befallen you ? Give Him time, and all will come right. If I might advise you, I would say, just wait two or three years, and I will answer for it, you will come out all right. It is always easy to go out of this world. Why will you seize an unlucky moment ? ”

While Jean was thus exerting himself to persuade his master, the latter walked in silence, and, as those who suffer often do, was looking this way and that as though seeking for something which might bind him to life. As chance would have it, at this juncture, Mademoiselle Godeau, the daughter of the *fermier-général*, happened to pass with her governess. The mansion in which she lived was not far distant ; Croisilles saw her enter it. This meeting produced on him more effect than all the reasonings in the world. I have said that he was rather erratic, and nearly always yielded to the first impulse. Without hesitating an instant, and without explanation, he suddenly left the arm of his old servant, and crossing the street, knocked at Monsieur Godeau's door.

II.

WHEN we try to picture to ourselves, nowadays, what was called a "financier" in times gone by, we invariably imagine enormous corpulence, short legs, a gigantic wig, and a broad face with a triple chin,—and it is not without reason that we have become accustomed to form such a picture of such a per-

sonage. Everyone knows to what great abuses the royal tax-farming led, and it seems as though there were a law of nature which renders fatter than the rest of mankind those who fatten, not only upon their own laziness, but also upon the work of others.

Monsieur Godeau, among financiers, was one of the most classical to be found,—that is to say, one of the fattest. At the present time he had the gout, which was nearly as fashionable in his day as the nervous headache is in ours. Stretched upon a lounge, his eyes half-closed, he was coddling himself in the coziest corner of a dainty boudoir. The panel-mirrors which surrounded him, majestically duplicated on every side his enormous person ; bags filled with gold covered the table ; around him, the furniture, the wainscot, the doors, the locks, the mantel-piece, the ceiling were gilded ; so was his coat. I do not know but that his brain was gilded too. He was calculating the issue of a little business affair which could not fail to bring him a few thousand louis ; and was even deigning to smile over it to himself when Croisilles was announced. The young man entered with an humble, but resolute air, and with every outward manifestation of that inward tumult with which we find no diffi-

culty in crediting a man who is longing to drown himself. Monsieur Godeau was a little surprised at this unexpected visit ; then he thought his daughter had been buying some trifle, and was confirmed in that thought by seeing her appear almost at the same time with the young man. He made a sign to Croisilles not to sit down but to speak. The young lady seated herself on a sofa, and Croisilles, remaining standing, expressed himself in these terms :

“ Sir, my father has failed. The bankruptcy of a partner has forced him to suspend his payments, and unable to witness his own shame, he has fled to America, after having paid his last sou to his creditors. I was absent when all this happened ; I have just come back and have known of these events only two hours. I am absolutely without resources, and determined to die. It is very probable that, on leaving your house, I shall throw myself into the water. In all probability, I would already have done so, if I had not chanced to meet, at the very moment, this young lady, your daughter. I love her, sir, from the very depths of my heart ; for two years I have been in love with her, and my silence, until now, proves better than anything else the respect I feel for her ; but to-

day, in declaring my passion to you, I fulfill an imperative duty, and I would think I was offending God, if, before giving myself over to death, I did not come to ask you Mademoiselle Julie in marriage. I have not the slightest hope that you will grant this request ; but I have to make it, nevertheless, for I am a good Christian, sir, and when a good Christian sees himself come to such a point of misery that he can no longer suffer life, he must at least, to extenuate his crime, exhaust all the chances which remain to him before taking the final and fatal step."

At the beginning of this speech, Monsieur Godeau had supposed that the young man came to borrow money, and so he prudently threw his handkerchief over the bags that were lying around him, preparing in advance a refusal, and a polite one, for he always felt some good-will toward the father of Croisilles. But when he had heard the young man to the end, and understood the purport of his visit, he never doubted one moment but that the poor fellow had gone completely mad. He was at first tempted to ring the bell and have him put out; but, noticing his firm demeanor, his determined look, the *fermier-général* took pity on so inoffensive a case of insanity.

He merely told his daughter to retire, so that she might be no longer exposed to hearing such improprieties.

While Croisilles was speaking, Mademoiselle Godeau had blushed as a peach in the month of August. At her father's bidding, she retired, the young man making her a profound bow, which she did not seem to notice. Left alone with Croisilles, Monsieur Godeau coughed, rose, then dropped again upon the cushions, and, trying to assume a paternal air, delivered himself to the following effect.

"My boy," said he, "I am willing to believe that you are not poking fun at me, but you have really lost your head. I not only excuse this proceeding, but I consent not to punish you for it. I am sorry that your poor devil of a father has become bankrupt and has skipped. It is indeed very sad, and I quite understand that such a misfortune should affect your brain. Besides, I wish to do something for you ; so take this stool and sit down there."

"It is useless, sir," answered Croisilles ; "If you refuse me, as I see you do, I have nothing left but to take my leave. I wish you every good fortune."

"And where are you going ?"

"To write to my father and say good-bye to him."

"Eh! the devil! Any one would swear you were speaking the truth. I'll be damned if I don't think you are going to drown yourself."

"Yes, sir; at least I think so, if my courage does not forsake me."

"That's a bright idea! Fie on you! How can you be such a fool? Sit down, sir, I tell you, and listen to me."

Monsieur Godeau had just made a very wise reflection, which was that it is never agreeable to have it said that a man, whoever he may be, threw himself into the water on leaving your house. He therefore coughed once more, took his snuff-box, cast a careless glance upon his shirt-frill, and continued :

"It is evident that you are nothing but a simpleton, a fool, a regular baby. You do not know what you are saying. You are ruined, that's what has happened to you. But, my dear friend, all that is not enough; one must reflect upon the things of this world. If you came to ask me—well, good advice, for instance,—I might give it to you; but what is it you are after? You are in love with my daughter?"

"Yes, sir, and I repeat to you, that I am far from supposing that you can give her to me in marriage ; but as there is nothing in the world but that, which could prevent me from dying, if you believe in God, as I do not doubt you do, you will understand the reason that brings me here."

"Whether I believe in God or not, is no business of yours. I do not intend to be questioned. Answer me first : where have you seen my daughter ?"

"In my father's shop, and in this house, when I brought jewelry for Mademoiselle Julie."

"Who told you her name was Julie ? What are we coming to, great heavens ! But be her name Julie or Javotte, do you know what is wanted in any one who aspires to the hand of the daughter of a *fermier-général* ?"

"No, I am completely ignorant of it, unless it is to be as rich as she."

"Something more is necessary, my boy ; you must have a name."

"Well ! my name is Croisilles."

"Your name is *Croisilles*, poor wretch ! Do you call that a name ?"

"Upon my soul and conscience, sir, it seems to me to be as good a name as Godeau."

"You are very impertinent, sir, and you shall rue it."

"Indeed, sir, do not be angry ; I had not the least idea of offending you. If you see in what I said anything to wound you, and wish to punish me for it, there is no need to get angry. Have I not told you that on leaving here I am going straight to drown myself ?"

Although M. Godeau had promised himself to send Croisilles away as gently as possible, in order to avoid all scandal, his prudence could not resist the vexation of his wounded pride. The interview to which he had to resign himself was monstrous enough in itself ; it may be imagined then, what he felt at hearing himself spoken to in such terms.

"Listen," he said, almost beside himself, and determined to close the matter at any cost. "You are not such a fool that you cannot understand a word of common sense. Are you rich ? No. Are you noble ? Still less so. What is this frenzy that brings you here ? You come to worry me, you think you are doing something clever ; you know perfectly well that it is useless ; you wish to make me responsible for your death. Have you any right to complain of me ? Do I owe a sou to your father ? Is it my fault that you have come to this ? Mon Dieu !

When a man is going to drown himself, he keeps quiet about it—”

“That is what I am going to do now. I am your very humble servant.”

“One moment ! It shall not be said that you had recourse to me in vain. There, my boy, here are three louis d’or ; go and have dinner in the kitchen, and let me hear no more about you.”

“Much obliged ; I am not hungry, and I have no use for your money.”

So Croisilles left the room, and the financier, having set his conscience at rest by the offer he had just made, settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and resumed his meditations.

Mademoiselle Godeau, during this time, was not so far away as one might suppose ; she had, it is true, withdrawn in obedience to her father ; but, instead of going to her room, she had remained listening behind the door. If the extravagance of Croisilles seemed incredible to her, still she found nothing to offend her in it ; for love, since the world has existed, has never passed as an insult. On the other hand, as it was not possible to doubt the despair of the young man, Mademoiselle Godeau found herself a victim, at one and the same time, to the two sentiments most dan-

gerous to women—compassion and curiosity. When she saw the interview at an end, and Croisilles ready to come out, she rapidly crossed the drawing-room where she stood, not wishing to be surprised eavesdropping, and hurried towards her apartment ; but she almost immediately retraced her steps. The idea that perhaps Croisilles was really going to put an end to his life troubled her in spite of herself. Scarcely aware of what she was doing, she walked to meet him ; the drawing-room was large, and the two young people came slowly towards each other. Croisilles was as pale as death, and Mademoiselle Godeau vainly sought words to express her feelings. In passing beside him, she let fall on the floor a bunch of violets which she held in her hand. He at once bent down and picked up the bouquet in order to give it back to her, but, instead of taking it, she passed on without uttering a word, and entered her father's room. Croisilles, alone again, put the flowers in his breast, and left the house with a troubled heart, not knowing what to think of his adventure.

III.

Scarcely had he taken a few steps in the street, when he saw his faithful friend Jean running towards him with a joyful face.

"What has happened?" he asked; "have you news to tell me?"

"Yes," replied Jean; "I have to tell you that the seals have been officially broken and that you can enter your home. All your father's debts being paid, you remain the owner of the house. It is true that all the money and all the jewels have been taken away; but at least the house belongs to you, and you have not lost everything. I have been running about for an hour, not knowing what had become of you, and I hope, my dear master, that you will now be wise enough to take a reasonable course."

"What course do you wish me to take?"

"Sell this house, sir, it is all your fortune. It will bring you about thirty thousand francs. With that at any rate you will not die of hunger; and what is to prevent you from buying a little stock in trade, and starting business for yourself? You would surely prosper."

"We shall see about this," answered Croi-

silles, as he hurried to the street where his home was. He was eager to see the paternal roof again. But when he arrived there so sad a spectacle met his gaze, that he had scarcely the courage to enter. The shop was in utter disorder, the rooms deserted, his father's alcove empty. Everything presented to his eyes the wretchedness of utter ruin. Not a chair remained ; all the drawers had been ransacked, the till broken open, the chest taken away ; nothing had escaped the greedy search of creditors and lawyers ; who, after having pillaged the house, had gone, leaving the doors open, as though to testify to all passers-by how neatly their work was done.

" This, then," exclaimed Croisilles, " is all that remains after thirty years of work and a respectable life,—and all through the failure to have ready, on a given day, money enough to honor a signature imprudently given ! "

While the young man walked up and down given over to the saddest thoughts, Jean seemed very much embarrassed. He supposed that his master was without ready money, and that he might perhaps not even have dined. He was therefore trying to think of some way to question him on the subject, and to offer him, in case of need, some part of his savings. After having tortured his mind for

a quarter of an hour to try and hit upon some way of leading up to the subject, he could find nothing better than to come up to Croisilles, and ask him, in a kindly voice :

“Sir, do you still like roast partridges?”

The poor man uttered this question in a tone at once so comical and so touching, that Croisilles, in spite of his sadness, could not refrain from laughing.

“And why do you ask me that?” said he.

“My wife,” replied Jean, “is cooking me some for dinner, sir, and if by chance you still liked them—”

Croisilles had completely forgotten till now the money which he was bringing back to his father. Jean’s proposal reminded him that his pockets were full of gold.

“I thank you with all my heart,” said he to the old man, “and I accept your dinner with pleasure ; but, if you are anxious about my fortune, be reassured. I have more money than I need to have a good supper this evening, which you, in your turn, will share with me.”

Saying this, he laid upon the mantel four well-filled purses, which he emptied, each containing fifty louis.

“Although this sum does not belong to me,” he added, “I can use it for a day or

two. To whom must I go to have it forwarded to my father?"

"Sir," replied Jean, eagerly, "your father especially charged me to tell you that this money belongs to you, and, if I did not speak of it before, it was because I did not know how your affairs in Paris had turned out. Where he has gone your father will want for nothing; he will lodge with one of your correspondents, who will receive him most gladly; he has moreover taken with him enough for his immediate needs, for he was quite sure of still leaving behind more than was necessary to pay all his just debts. All that he has left, sir, is yours; he says so himself in his letter, and I am especially charged to repeat it to you. That gold is, therefore, legitimately your property, as this house in which we are now. I can repeat to you the very words your father said to me on embarking: 'May my son forgive me for leaving him; may he remember that I am still in the world only to love me, and let him use what remains after my debts are paid as though it were his inheritance.' Those, sir, are his own expressions; so put this back in your pocket, and, since you accept my dinner, pray let us go home."

The honest joy which shone in Jean's eyes,

left no doubt in the mind of Croisilles. The words of his father had moved him to such a point that he could not restrain his tears ; on the other hand, at such a moment, four thousand francs were no bagatelle. As to the house, it was not an available resource, for one could realize on it only by selling it, and that was both difficult and slow. All this, however, could not but make a considerable change in the situation the young man found himself in ; so he felt suddenly moved—shaken in his dismal resolution, and, so to speak, both sad and, at the same time, relieved of much of his distress. After having closed the shutters of the shop, he left the house with Jean, and as he once more crossed the town, could not help thinking how small a thing our affections are, since they sometimes serve to make us find an unforeseen joy in the faintest ray of hope. It was with this thought that he sat down to dinner beside his old servant, who did not fail, during the repast, to make every effort to cheer him.

Heedless people have a happy fault. They are easily cast down, but they have not even the trouble to console themselves, so changeable is their mind. It would be a mistake to think them, on that account, insensible or

selfish ; on the contrary they perhaps feel more keenly than others and are but too prone to blow their brains out in a moment of despair ; but, this moment once passed, if they are still alive, they must dine, they must eat, they must drink, as usual ; only to melt into tears again, at bed-time. Joy and pain do not glide over them but pierce them through like arrows. Kind, hot-headed natures which know how to suffer, but not how to lie, through which one can clearly read,—not fragile and empty like glass, but solid and transparent like rock crystal.

After having clinked glasses with Jean, Croisilles, instead of drowning himself, went to the play. Standing at the back of the pit, he drew from his bosom Mademoiselle Godeau's bouquet, and, as he breathed the perfume in deep meditation, he began to think in a calmer spirit about his adventure of the morning. As soon as he had pondered over it for awhile, he saw clearly the truth ; that is to say, that the young lady, in leaving the bouquet in his hands, and in refusing to take it back, had wished to give him a mark of interest ; for otherwise this refusal and this silence could only have been marks of contempt, and such a supposition was not possible. Croisilles, therefore, judged that

Mademoiselle Godeau's heart was of a softer grain than her father's, and he remembered distinctly that the young lady's face, when she crossed the drawing-room, had expressed an emotion the more true that it seemed involuntary. But was this emotion one of love, or only of sympathy? Or was it perhaps something of still less importance,—mere commonplace pity? Had Mademoiselle Godeau feared to see *him* die—him, Croisilles—or merely to be the cause of the death of a man, no matter what man? Although withered and almost leafless, the bouquet still retained so exquisite an odor and so brave a look, that in breathing it and looking at it, Croisilles could not help hoping. It was a thin garland of roses round a bunch of violets. What mysterious depths of sentiment an Oriental might have read in these flowers, by interpreting their language! But after all, he need not be an Oriental in this case. The flowers which fall from the breast of a pretty woman, in Europe, as in the East, are never mute; were they but to tell what they have seen while reposing in that lovely bosom, it would be enough for a lover, and this, in fact, they do. Perfumes have more than one resemblance to love, and there are even people who think love to

be but a sort of perfume ; it is true the flowers which exhale it are the most beautiful in creation.

While Croisilles mused thus, paying very little attention to the tragedy that was being acted at the time, Mademoiselle Godeau herself appeared in a box opposite.

The idea did not occur to the young man that, if she should notice him, she might think it very strange to find the would-be suicide there after what had transpired in the morning. He, on the contrary, bent all his efforts towards getting nearer to her ; but he could not succeed. A fifth-rate actress from Paris had come to play *Mélope*, and the crowd was so dense that one could not move. For lack of anything better, Croisilles had to content himself with fixing his gaze upon his lady-love, not lifting his eyes from her for a moment. He noticed that she seemed pre-occupied and moody, and that she spoke to every one with a sort of repugnance. Her box was surrounded, as may be imagined, by all the fops of the neighborhood, each of whom passed several times before her in the gallery, totally unable to enter the box, of which her father filled more than three-fourths. Croisilles noticed further that she was not using her opera-

glasses, nor was she listening to the play. Her elbows resting on the balustrade, her chin in her hand, with her far-away look, she seemed, in all her sumptuous apparel, like some statue of Venus disguised *en marquise*. The display of her dress and her hair, her rouge, beneath which one could guess her paleness, all the splendor of her toilet, did but the more distinctly bring out the immobility of her countenance. Never had Croisilles seen her so beautiful. Having found means, between the acts, to escape from the crush, he hurried off to look at her from the passage leading to her box, and, strange to say, scarcely had he reached it, when Mademoiselle Godeau, who had not stirred for the last hour, turned round. She started slightly as she noticed him and only cast a glance at him ; then she resumed her former attitude. Whether that glance expressed surprise, anxiety, pleasure or love ; whether it meant "What, not dead !" or "God be praised ! There you are, living !" —I do not pretend to explain. Be that as it may ; at that glance, Croisilles inwardly swore to himself to die or gain her love.

IV.

Of all the obstacles which hinder the smooth course of love, the greatest is, without doubt, what is called false shame, which is indeed a very potent obstacle.

Croisilles was not troubled with this unhappy failing, which both pride and timidity combine to produce ; he was not one of those who, for whole months, hover round the woman they love, like a cat round a caged bird. As soon as he had given up the idea of drowning himself, he thought only of letting his dear Julie know that he lived solely for her. But how could he tell her so ? Should he present himself a second time at the mansion of the *fermier-général*, it was but too certain that M. Godeau would have him ejected. Julie, when she happened to take a walk, never went without her maid ; it was therefore useless to undertake to follow her. To pass the nights under the windows of one's beloved is a folly dear to lovers, but, in the present case, it would certainly prove vain. I said before that Croisilles was very religious ; it therefore never entered his mind to seek to meet his lady-love at church. As the best way, though the most dangerous, is

to write to people when one cannot speak to them in person, he decided on the very next day to write to the young lady.

His letter possessd, naturally, neither order nor reason. It read somewhat as follows :

“**MADemoisELLE :**

“Tell me exactly, I beg of you, what fortune one must possess to be able to pretend to your hand. I am asking you a strange question ; but I love you so desperately, that it is impossible for me not to ask it, and you are the only person in the world to whom I can address it. It seemed to me, last evening, that you looked at me at the play. I had wished to die ; would to God I were indeed dead, if I am mistaken, and if that look was not meant for me. Tell me if Fate can be so cruel as to let a man deceive himself in a manner at once so sad and so sweet. I believe that you commanded me to live. You are rich, beautiful. I know it. Your father is arrogant and miserly, and you have a right to be proud ; but I love you, and the rest is a dream. Fix your charming eyes on me ; think of what love can do, when I who suffer so cruelly, who must stand in fear of everything, feel, nevertheless, an inexpressible joy in writing you this mad letter, which will perhaps bring down your anger upon me. But think also, mademoiselle, that you are a little to blame for this, my folly. Why did you drop that bouquet ? Put yourself for an instant, if possible, in my place ; I dare think

that you love me, and I dare ask you to tell me so. Forgive me, I beseech you. I would give my life's blood to be sure of not offending you, and to see you listening to my love with that angel smile which belongs only to you.

"Whatever you may do, your image remains mine ; you can remove it only by tearing out my heart. As long as your look lives in my remembrance, as long as the bouquet keeps a trace of its perfume, as long as a word will tell of love, I will cherish hope."

Having sealed his letter, Croisilles went out and walked up and down the street opposite the Godeau mansion, waiting for a servant to come out. Chance, which always serves mysterious loves, when it can do so without compromising itself, willed it that Mademoiselle Julie's maid should have arranged to purchase a cap on that day. She was going to the milliner's when Croisilles accosted her, slipped a louis into her hand, and asked her to take charge of his letter. The bargain was soon struck ; the servant took the money to pay for her cap and promised to do the errand out of gratitude. Croisilles, full of joy, went home and sat at his door awaiting an answer.

Before speaking of this answer, a word must be said about Mademoiselle Godeau.

She was not quite free from the vanity of her father, but her good nature was ever uppermost. She was, in the full meaning of the term, a spoilt child. She habitually spoke very little, and never was she seen with a needle in her hand ; she spent her days at her toilet, and her evenings on the sofa, not seeming to hear the conversation going on around her. As regards her dress, she was prodigiously coquettish, and her own face was surely what she thought most of on earth. A wrinkle in her collarette, an ink-spot on her finger, would have distressed her ; and, when her dress pleased her, nothing can describe the last look which she cast at her mirror before leaving the room. She showed neither taste nor aversion for the pleasure in which young ladies usually delight. She went to balls willingly enough, and renounced going to them without a show of temper, sometimes without motive. The play wearied her, and she was in the constant habit of falling asleep there. When her father, who worshipped her, proposed to make her some present of her own choice, she took an hour to decide, not being able to think of anything she cared for. When M. Godeau gave a reception or a dinner, it often happened that Julie would not appear in the drawing-

room, and at such times she passed the evening alone in her own room, in full dress, walking up and down, her fan in her hand. If a compliment was addressed to her, she turned away her head, and if any one attempted to pay court to her, she responded only by a look at once so dazzling and so serious as to disconcert even the boldest. Never had a sally made her laugh; never had an air in an opera, a flight of tragedy, moved her; indeed, never had her heart given a sign of life; and, on seeing her pass in all the splendor of her nonchalant loveliness one might have taken her for a beautiful somnambulist, walking through the world as in a trance.

So much indifference and coquetry did not seem easy to understand. Some said she loved nothing, others that she loved nothing but herself. A single word, however, suffices to explain her character,—she was waiting. From the age of fourteen she had heard it ceaselessly repeated that nothing was so charming as she. She was convinced of this, and that was why she paid so much attention to dress. In failing to do honor to her own person, she would have thought herself guilty of sacrilege. She walked, in her beauty, so to speak, like a child in its holiday

dress ; but she was very far from thinking that her beauty was to remain useless. Beneath her apparent unconcern she had a will, secret, inflexible, and the more potent the better it was concealed. The coquetry of ordinary women, which spends itself in ogling, in simpering, and in smiling, seemed to her a childish, vain, almost contemptible way of fighting with shadows. She felt herself in possession of a treasure, and she disdained to stake it piece by piece ; she needed an adversary worthy of herself ; but, too accustomed to see her wishes anticipated, she did not seek that adversary ; it may even be said that she felt astonished at his failing to present himself. For the four or five years that she had been out in society and had conscientiously displayed her flowers, her furbelows, and her beautiful shoulders, it seemed to her inconceivable that she had not yet inspired some great passion. Had she said what was really behind her thoughts, she certainly would have replied to her many flatterers : " Well ! if it is true that I am so beautiful, why do you not blow your brains out for me ? " An answer which many other young girls might make, and which more than one who says nothing hides away in a corner of her heart, not far perhaps from the tip of her tongue.

What is there, indeed, in the world, more tantalizing for a woman than to be young, rich, beautiful, to look at herself in her mirror and see herself charmingly dressed, worthy in every way to please, fully disposed to allow herself to be loved, and to have to say to herself : "I am admired, I am praised, all the world thinks me charming, but nobody loves me. My gown is by the best maker, my laces are superb, my coiffure is irreproachable, my face the most beautiful on earth, my figure slender, my foot prettily turned, and all this helps me to nothing but to go and yawn in the corner of some drawing-room ! If a young man speaks to me he treats me as a child ; if I am asked in marriage, it is for my dowry ; if somebody presses my hand in a dance, it is sure to be some provincial fop ; as soon as I appear anywhere, I excite a murmur of admiration ; but nobody speaks low, in my ear, a word that makes my heart beat. I hear impertinent men praising me in loud tones, a couple of feet away, and never a look of humbly sincere adoration meets mine. Still I have an ardent soul full of life, and I am not, by any means, only a pretty doll to be shown about, to be made to dance at a ball, to be dressed by a maid in the morning and undressed at night—

beginning the whole thing over again the next day."

That is what Mademoiselle Godeau had many times said to herself ; and there were hours when that thought inspired her with so gloomy a feeling that she remained mute and almost motionless for a whole day. When Croisilles wrote her, she was in just such a fit of ill-humor. She had just been taking her chocolate and was deep in meditation, stretched upon a lounge, when her maid entered and handed her the letter with a mysterious air. She looked at the address, and not recognizing the handwriting, fell again to musing. The maid then saw herself forced to explain what it was, which she did with a rather disconcerted air, not being at all sure how the young lady would take the matter. Mademoiselle Godeau listened without moving, then opened the letter, and cast only a glance at it ; she at once asked for a sheet of paper, and nonchalantly wrote these few words :

" No, sir, I assure you I am not proud. If you had only a hundred thousand crowns, I would willingly marry you."

Such was the reply which the maid at once took to Croisilles, who gave her another lous for her trouble.

V.

A hundred thousand crowns are not found "in a donkey's hoof-print," and if Croisilles had been suspicious he might have thought in reading Mademoiselle Godeau's letter that she was either crazy or laughing at him. He thought neither, for he only saw in it that his darling Julie loved him, and that he must have a hundred thousand crowns, and he dreamed from that moment of nothing but trying to secure them.

He possessed two hundred louis in cash, plus a house which, as I have said, might be worth about thirty thousand francs. What was to be done? How was he to go about transfiguring these thirty-four thousand francs, at a jump, into three hundred thousand. The first idea which came into the mind of the young man was to find some way of staking his whole fortune on the toss-up of a coin, but for that he must sell the house. Croisilles therefore began by putting a notice upon the door, stating that his house was for sale ; then, while dreaming what he would do with the money that he would get for it, he awaited a purchaser.

A week went by, then another ; not a single

purchaser applied. More and more distressed, Croisilles spent these days with Jean, and despair was taking possession of him once more, when a Jewish broker rang at the door.

"This house is for sale, sir, is it not ? Are you the owner of it ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how much is it worth ?"

"Thirty thousand francs, I believe ; at least I have heard my father say so."

The Jew visited all the rooms, went upstairs and down into the cellar, knocking on the walls, counting the steps of the staircase, turning the doors on their hinges and the keys in their locks, opening and closing the windows ; then, at last, after having thoroughly examined everything, without saying a word and without making the slightest proposal, he bowed to Croisilles and retired.

Croisilles, who for a whole hour had followed him with a palpitating heart, as may be imagined, was not a little disappointed at this silent retreat. He thought that perhaps the Jew had wished to give himself time to reflect and that he would return presently. He waited a week for him, not daring to go out for fear of missing his visit, and looking out of the windows from morning till night. But it was in vain ; the Jew did not reappear. Jean, true

to his unpleasant rôle of adviser, brought moral pressure to bear to dissuade his master from selling his house in so hasty a manner and for so extravagant a purpose. Dying of impatience, ennui, and love, Croisilles one morning took his two hundred louis and went out, determined to tempt fortune with this sum, since he could not have more.

The gaming-houses at that time were not public, and that refinement of civilization which enables the first comer to ruin himself at all hours, as soon as the wish enters his mind, had not yet been invented.

Scarcely was Croisilles in the street before he stopped, not knowing where to go to stake his money. He looked at the houses of the neighborhood, and eyed them, one after the other, striving to discover suspicious appearances that might point out to him the object of his search. A good-looking young man, splendidly dressed, happened to pass. Judging from his mien, he was certainly a young man of gentle blood and ample leisure, so Croisilles politely accosted him.

"Sir," he said, "I beg your pardon for the liberty I take. I have two hundred louis in my pocket and I am dying either to lose them or win more. Could you not point out

to me some respectable place where such things are done ?”

At this rather strange speech the young man burst out laughing.

“Upon my word, sir !” answered he, “if you are seeking any such wicked place you have but to follow me, for that is just where I am going.”

Croisilles followed him, and a few steps farther they both entered a house of very attractive appearance, where they were received hospitably by an old gentleman of the highest breeding. Several young men were already seated round a green cloth ; Croisilles modestly took a place there, and in less than an hour his two hundred louis were gone.

He came out as sad as a lover can be who thinks himself beloved. He had not enough to dine with, but that did not cause him any anxiety.

“What can I do now,” he asked himself, “to get money ? To whom shall I address myself in this town ? Who will lend me even a hundred louis on this house that I can not sell ?”

While he was in this quandary, he met his Jewish broker. He did not hesitate to address him, and, featherhead as he was, did not fail to tell him the plight he was in.

The Jew did not much want to buy the house; he had come to see it only through curiosity, or, to speak more exactly, for the satisfaction of his own conscience, as a passing dog goes into a kitchen, the door of which stands open, to see if there is nothing to steal. But when he saw Croisilles so despondent, so sad, so bereft of all resources, he could not resist the temptation to put himself to some inconvenience, even, in order to pay for the house. He therefore offered him about one-fourth of its value. Croisilles fell upon his neck, called him his friend and saviour, blindly signed a bargain that would have made one's hair stand on end, and, on the very next day, the possessor of four hundred new louis, he once more turned his steps toward the gambling-house where he had been so politely and speedily ruined the night before.

On his way, he passed by the wharf. A vessel was about leaving; the wind was gentle, the ocean tranquil. On all sides, merchants, sailors, officers in uniform were coming and going. Porters were carrying enormous bales of merchandise. Passengers and their friends were exchanging farewells, small boats were rowing about in all directions; on every face could be read fear, im-

patience, or hope ; and, amidst all the agitation which surrounded it, the majestic vessel swayed gently to and fro under the wind that swelled her proud sails.

“What a grand thing it is,” thought Croisilles, “to risk all one possesses and go beyond the sea, in perilous search of fortune ! How it fills me with emotion to look at this vessel setting out on her voyage, loaded with so much wealth, with the welfare of so many families ! What joy to see her come back again, bringing twice as much as was intrusted to her, returning so much prouder and richer than she went away ! Why am I not one of those merchants ? Why could I not stake my four hundred louis in this way ? This immense sea ! What a green cloth, on which to boldly tempt fortune ! Why should I not myself buy a few bales of cloth or silk ? What is to prevent my doing so, since I have gold ? Why should this captain refuse to take charge of my merchandise ? And who knows ? Instead of going and throwing away this—my little all—in a gambling-house, I might double it, I might triple it, perhaps, by honest industry. If Julie truly loves me, she will wait a few years, she will remain true to me until I am able to marry her. Commerce sometimes yields greater

profits than one thinks ; examples are not wanting in this world of wealth gained with astonishing rapidity in this way on the changing waves—why should Providence not bless an endeavor made for a purpose so laudable, so worthy of His assistance ? Among these merchants who have accumulated so much and who send their vessels to the ends of the world, more than one has begun with a smaller sum than I have now. They have prospered with the help of God ; why should I not prosper in my turn ? It seems to me as though a good wind were filling these sails, and this vessel inspires confidence. Come ! the die is cast ; I will speak to the captain, who seems to be a good fellow ; I will then write to Julie, and set out to become a clever and successful trader."

The greatest danger incurred by those who are habitually but half crazy, is that of becoming, at times, altogether so. The poor fellow, without further deliberation, put his whim into execution. To find goods to buy, when one has money and knows nothing about the goods, is the easiest thing in the world. The captain, to oblige Croisilles, took him to one of his friends, a manufacturer, who sold him as much cloth and silk as he could pay for. The whole of it, loaded

upon a cart, was promptly taken on board. Croisilles, delighted and full of hope, had himself written in large letters his name upon the bales. He watched them being put on board with inexpressible joy ; the hour of departure soon came, and the vessel weighed anchor.

VI.

I need not say that, in this transaction, Croisilles had kept no money in hand. His house was sold ; and there remained to him, for his sole fortune, the clothes he had on his back ;—no home, and not a sou. With the best will possible, Jean could not suppose that his master was reduced to such an extremity ; Croisilles was not too proud, but too thoughtless to tell him of it. So he determined to sleep under the starry vault, and as for his meals, he made the following calculation : he presumed that the vessel which bore his fortune would be six months before coming back to Havre ; Croisilles, therefore, not without regret, sold a gold watch his father had given him, and which he had fortunately kept ; he got thirty-six livres for it. That was sufficient to live on for about six

months, at the rate of four sous a day. He did not doubt that it would be enough, and, reassured for the present, he wrote to Mademoiselle Godeau to inform her of what he had done. He was very careful in his letter not to speak of his distress ; he announced to her, on the contrary, that he had undertaken a magnificent commercial enterprise, of the speedy and fortunate issue of which there could be no doubt ; he explained to her that *La Fleurette*, a merchant-vessel of one hundred and fifty tons, was carrying to the Baltic his cloths and his silks, and implored her to remain faithful to him for a year, reserving to himself the right of asking, later on, for a further delay, while, for his part, he swore eternal love to her.

When Mademoiselle Godeau received this letter, she was sitting before the fire, and had in her hand, using it as a screen, one of those bulletins which are printed in seaports, announcing the arrival and departure of vessels, and which also report disasters at sea. It had never occurred to her, as one can well imagine, to take an interest in this sort of thing ; she had in fact never glanced at any of these sheets. The perusal of Croisilles' letter prompted her to read the bulletin she had been holding in her hand ; the

first word that caught her eye was no other than the name of *La Fleurette*.—The vessel had been wrecked on the coast of France, on the very night following its departure. The crew had barely escaped, but all the cargo was lost.

Mademoiselle Godeau, at this news, no longer remembered that Croisilles had made to her an avowal of his poverty ; she was as heartbroken as though a million had been at stake. In an instant, the horrors of the tempest, the fury of the winds, the cries of the drowning, the ruin of the man who loved her, presented themselves to her mind like a scene in a romance. The bulletin and the letter fell from her hands. She rose in great agitation, and, with heaving breast and eyes brimming with tears, paced up and down, determined to act, and asking herself how she should act.

There is one thing that must be said in justice to love ; it is that the stronger, the clearer, the simpler the considerations opposed to it, in a word, the less common-sense there is in the matter, the wilder does the passion become and the more does the lover love. It is one of the most beautiful things under heaven, this irrationality of the heart. We should not be worth much with-

out it. After having walked about the room (without forgetting either her dear fan or the passing glance at the mirror), Julie allowed herself to sink once more upon her lounge. Whoever had seen her at this moment would have looked upon a lovely sight ; her eyes sparkled, her cheeks were on fire ; she sighed deeply, and murmured in a delicious transport of joy and pain :

“ Poor fellow ! He has ruined himself for me ! ”

Independently of the fortune which she could expect from her father, Mademoiselle Godeau had in her own right the property her mother had left her. She had never thought of it. At this moment, for the first time in her life, she remembered that she could dispose of five hundred thousand francs. This thought brought a smile to her lips ; a project, strange, bold, wholly feminine, almost as mad as Croisilles himself, entered her head ;—she weighed the idea in her mind for some time, then decided to act upon it at once.

She began by inquiring whether Croisilles had any relatives or friends ; the maid was sent out in all directions to find out. Having made minute inquiries in all quarters, she discovered, on the fourth floor of an old

rickety house, a half-crippled aunt, who never stirred from her arm-chair, and had not been out for four or five years. This poor woman, very old, seemed to have been left in the world expressly as a specimen of human misery. Blind, gouty, almost deaf, she lived alone in a garret ; but a gayety, stronger than misfortune and illness, sustained her at eighty years of age, and made her still love life. Her neighbors never passed her door without going in to see her, and the antiquated tunes she hummed enlivened all the girls of the neighborhood. She possessed a little annuity which sufficed to maintain her ; as long as day lasted, she knitted. She did not know what had happened since the death of Louis XIV.

It was to this worthy person that Julie had herself privately conducted. She donned for the occasion all her finery ; feathers, laces, ribbons, diamonds, nothing was spared. She wanted to be fascinating ; but the real secret of her beauty, in this case, was the whim that was carrying her away. She went up the steep, dark staircase which led to the good lady's chamber, and, after the most graceful bow, spoke somewhat as follows :

" You have, madame, a nephew, called Croisilles, who loves me and has asked for

my hand ; I love him too and wish to marry him ; but my father, Monsieur Godeau, *fermier-général* of this town, refuses his consent, because your nephew is not rich. I would not, for the world, give occasion to scandal, nor cause trouble to anybody ; I would therefore never think of disposing of myself without the consent of my family. I come to ask you a favor, which I beseech you to grant me. You must come yourself and propose this marriage to my father. I have, thank God, a little fortune which is quite at your disposal ; you may take possession, whenever you see fit, of five hundred thousand francs at my notary's. You will say that this sum belongs to your nephew, which in fact it does. It is not a present that I am making him, it is a debt which I am paying, for I am the cause of the ruin of Croisilles, and it is but just that I should repair it. My father will not easily give in ; you will be obliged to insist and you must have a little courage ; I, for my part, will not fail. As nobody on earth excepting myself has any right to the sum of which I am speaking to you, nobody will ever know in what way this amount will have passed into your hands. You are not very rich yourself, I know, and you may fear that people will be astonished

to see you thus endowing your nephew ; but remember that my father does not know you, that you show yourself very little in town, and that, consequently, it will be easy for you to pretend that you have just arrived from some journey. This step will doubtless be some exertion to you ; you will have to leave your arm-chair and take a little trouble ; but you will make two people happy, madame, and if you have ever known love, I hope you will not refuse me."

The old lady, during this discourse, had been in turn surprised, anxious, touched, and delighted. The last words persuaded her.

"Yes, my child," she repeated several times, "I know what it is,—I know what it is."

As she said this she made an effort to rise; her feeble limbs could barely support her ; Julie quickly advanced and put out her hand to help her ; by an almost involuntary movement they found themselves, in an instant, in each other's arms. A treaty was at once concluded ; a warm kiss sealed it in advance, and the necessary and confidential consultation followed without further trouble.

All the explanations having been made, the good lady drew from her wardrobe a venerable gown of taffeta, which had been her wed-

ding-dress. This antique piece of property was not less than fifty years old ; but not a spot, not a grain of dust had disfigured it ; Julie was in ecstasies over it. A coach was sent for, the handsomest in the town. The good lady prepared the speech she was going to make to Monsieur Godeau ; Julie tried to teach her how she was to touch the heart of her father, and did not hesitate to confess that love of rank was his vulnerable point.

“If you could imagine,” said she, “a means of flattering this weakness, you will have won our cause.”

The good lady pondered deeply, finished her toilet without another word, clasped the hands of her future niece, and entered the carriage. She soon arrived at the Godeau mansion ; there, she braced herself up so gallantly for her entrance that she seemed ten years younger. She majestically crossed the drawing-room where Julie’s bouquet had fallen, and, when the door of the boudoir opened, said in a firm voice to the lackey who preceded her :

“Announce the dowager Baroness de Croisilles.”

These words settled the happiness of the two lovers. Monsieur’ Godeau was bewildered by them. Although five hundred

thousand francs seemed little to him, he consented to everything, in order to make his daughter a baroness, and such she became ; —who would dare contest her title ? For my part, I think she had thoroughly earned it.

VALENTIN'S WAGER.
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

VAN BUCK, a Merchant.

VALENTIN VAN BUCK, his Nephew.

THE BARONESS DE MANTES.

CÉCILE, her daughter.

AN ABBÉ.

A DANCING MASTER.

AN INNKEEPER.

A WAITER.

The scene is laid, in the First Act, in Paris ;
throughout the rest of the piece, on the Baro-
ness' estate.



VALENTIN'S WAGER.

ACT I., SCENE I.—VALENTIN'S *Room*.

VAN BUCK. VALENTIN.

VAN BUCK. Nephew, I wish you good-morning.

VALENTIN. Uncle, your obedient servant.

VAN B. Keep your seat; I have something to say to you.

VAL. Sit you down then, I have something to hear from you ; kindly occupy that easy-chair, and put your hat down there.

VAN B. Nephew, the most indefatigable patience and the most robust obstinacy must, the one and the other, come to an end sooner or later. The thing which we tolerate becomes intolerable, what is not corrected incorrigible ; and he who has, a score of times, held out a pole to save a madman bent on drowning himself may one day be forced to choose between abandoning his efforts, and perishing with their object.

VAL. Now *that* is what I call an exordium. Uncle, your metaphors rise betimes in the morning.

VAN B. Sir ! Have the goodness to hold your tongue, and do not presume to trifle with me. In vain have I endeavored, these three years past, to make an impression upon you with the best advice my experience could command. A recklessness, a blind folly, good resolutions only made to be broken, a cursed weakness, all that I could do, or can still—But, by my beard, I will do no more ! Whither are you dragging me after you ? You are as pig-headed—

VAL. Uncle Van Buck, you are losing your temper.

VAN B. Do not interrupt me, sir. You have displayed as much obstinacy as I have credulity and indulgence. Could any one believe,—I ask you,—could any one believe that a young man of five-and-twenty would spend his life as you do ? Of what use have my remonstrances been ? When do you intend to enter a profession ? You are a poor man, for, after all is said and done, you have no fortune but mine ; but, let me tell you, I am not at the point of death, and my digestion is still sound. What do you propose doing between this and my decease ?

VAL. Uncle Van Buck, you have lost your temper, and you are going to forget yourself.

VAN B. No, sir ; I know what I am doing. If I am the only member of the family who has gone into trade, it is only thanks to me—and don't forget that—that the ruins of a shattered fortune have been repaired. It well becomes you to smile when I speak. If I had not sold gingham at Antwerp you and your flowered dressing-gown would now be in the poor-house. But, thank God, your vile *bouillotte*—

VAL. Uncle Van Buck, there you descend to the trivial, you are changing your key, forgetting yourself ;—your exordium was so much finer—

VAN B. *Sacrebleu !* Do you mock me, sir ? Am I of no value except to honor your drafts ? I had one of them this morning,—sixty louis ! Are you laughing at us all ? A pretty thing it is for you to be doing “the fashionable”—the devil take these English words—when you can't pay your tailor ! It is one thing to dismount from a fine horse to walk into the midst of a grand rich family, and quite another thing to get out of a hack carriage and climb up three dingy flights of stairs. When you return from the ball, in

your satin waistcoat, you must needs call for the porter to bring your candle, and he kicks when he doesn't get his New Year's gift. God only knows whether you give it him every year ! You live among people who are richer than yourself, and learn to look down on all of us,—you wear your beard in a point and your hair hanging down on your shoulders, as if you had not the price of a ribbon to tie it in a queue. You scribble for the newspapers,—you are capable of turning a disciple of Saint-Simon when you are left without a sou in the world or a shirt to your back,—and that is what it will come to, I answer for it. Bah ! A letter-writer at the street-corner is more respectable than you. I shall end by cutting you off, and you will have no shelter left but a garret.

VAL. Uncle Van Buck, I respect and love you. Do me the favor to listen to me. You have just honored my last draft. When you came here I was at the window and watched your arrival ; you were composing a sermon exactly as long as from here to your house. But let me beg of you to spare your breath. As to what you think I am fully aware ; as for what you do you have my thanks. That I am in debt and am good for nothing is possible ;—what do you mean to do about

it? You have an income of sixty thousand francs—

VAN B. Fifty!

VAL. Sixty, uncle. You have no children, and are full of kindness towards me. If I profit by it where is the harm? With a good sixty thousand francs per annum—

VAN B. Fifty! Fifty!—Not a penny more!

VAL. Sixty: you told me so yourself.

VAN B. Never! Where did you get the idea?

VAL. Let us say fifty, then. You are still young and hearty and enjoy life. Do you think that troubles me, or that I am longing for your fortune? I am sure you do me no such wrong; you know that a worthless head is not always the sign of a worthless heart. You quarrel with my dressing-gown;—surely you have worn many a dressing-gown in your time? My pointed beard is not a mark of Saint-Simonianism, I have too much respect for the rights of inheritance. You complain of my waistcoat;—would you like me to go out in my shirt and trousers? You tell me that I am poor and my friends are not;—so much the better for them, it is no fault of mine. You imagine that they spoil me and that their example teaches me scorn,—I am

only scornful of what bothers me, and, as you pay my debts, you know that I borrow from no one else. You reproach me with riding in cabs ;—it is only because I have no carriage of my own. As for my taking a candle from the porter when I come home, it is only to avoid going upstairs in the dark, —what is the use of breaking one's neck ? You wish to see me occupied ;—get me appointed prime-minister and you shall see how I will make my way in the world. But what can I learn as supernumerary clerk in a little law-office, except that all is vanity ? You say I play at *bouillotte* ;—that is because I win—when I have a good hand,—and, I assure you, I no sooner lose than I repent of my folly. It would be quite a different thing, you say, if I got off a fine horse to enter a fine *hôtel* ;—I believe you !—It is very easy to talk like that. You, moreover, express yourself as being proud of having sold gingham. Would to God that I sold gingham ! It would show that I was able to buy it. As for my noble descent, believe me, it is as dear to me as it is to you ; but it is precisely the reason why I don't go in harness, any more than thoroughbred horses do. By the way, uncle, if I am not mistaken, you haven't breakfasted yet. You have been fast-

ing over that confounded draft ; let us eat it up together. I will ring for some chocolate.

[*He rings. Breakfast is brought in.*

VAN B. What a breakfast ! Devil take it ! You live like a prince.

VAL. Well, what am I to do ? When a man is dying of hunger he must try to mitigate the agony.

[*They sit down to breakfast.*

VAN B. I am sure, now, that because I sit down here you fancy I forgive you.

VAL. I ? Not at all. What annoys me is that, when you are irritated, certain shop-counter expressions escape you in spite of yourself. Certainly, without knowing it, you fall short of that cream of politeness which is so peculiarly your characteristic. But when there are any third persons present, you understand, I won't tell.

VAN B. There, that will do. I tell you nothing of the kind escapes me. But we will say no more of that. I want to talk of something else. You must think of getting married.

VAL. Lord have mercy on us !—What did you say ?

VAN B. Give me some wine. I say you are getting old enough now to think of marrying.

VAL. But, uncle, what have I done to you?

VAN B. *Drafts*—But, even if you had done nothing to me, what is there so terrific in marriage? Look here, let us talk seriously. A pitiable object you would be, if I were to hand over a pretty, accomplished girl to you this evening, with fifty thousand crowns down, to brighten you up when you awake in the morning! You are in debt,—I will pay your debts. Once married, you will settle down. Mlle. de Mantes has all the qualities necessary—

VAL. Mlle. de Mantes? You are joking!

VAN B. Since her name has escaped me, I am not joking. She is the lady I allude to, and, if you like—

VAL. And if *she* likes. As the song says,—

“ I know very well it but rests with me
To marry her, if my bride she will be.”

VAN B. No, it depends on you. You are accepted, she likes you.

VAL. But I have never seen her in my life!

VAN B. Never mind! I tell you she likes you.

VAL. Really?

VAN B. I give you my word.

VAL. Well then, I don't like her.

VAN B. Why?

VAL. For the same reason that she likes me.

VAN B. There is no sense in saying you don't like a person whom you don't know.

VAL. Just as much as there is in saying you do. Please say no more about it.

VAN. B. But, my friend, when you come to think of it, (give me some wine) you must come to an end—

VAL. To be sure ; a man must die once in his life.

VAN B. I mean that you must make up your mind to stop this fool's life. What is to become of you? I warn you, some day I shall leave you in the lurch, in spite of myself. I have no idea of being ruined by you, and even if you wish to be my heir, you must be able to wait. Your marrying would cost me money, but then it would be once for all, and less than your follies will cost me in the long run. And then, I prefer to be rid of you. Consider what I have said ;—will you have a pretty wife, your debts paid, and an easy existence?

VAL. Since you are bent upon it, uncle, and are talking seriously, I am going to answer you seriously. Take some paté and listen to me.

VAN B. Well, let us hear your opinion.

VAL. Without wishing to go too far back, or weary you with preambles, I will begin with the ancients. Need I remind you of the way in which a man was served who had in nowise merited such treatment, who, through all his life, was of a gentle nature,—even so much so as to receive once more into his arms, after her transgression, her who had so outrageously betrayed him? The brother, too, of a powerful monarch, and, very improperly, crowned—

VAN B. What the devil are you talking about?

VAL. About Menelaus, uncle.

VAN B. The devil take you,—and me too! I am a great fool to listen to you.

VAL. Why? It appears to me very simple—

VAN B. Infernal, crack-brained scamp! It is impossible to make you utter one word of sense. [*He rises.*] Come, I have had enough of this! Young men respect nothing nowadays.

VAL. Uncle Van Buck, you are going to lose your temper.

VAN B. No, sir; but it is really quite preposterous. Is it to be expected that a man of my age should submit to be made a

plaything of by a boy? Do you take me for one of your comrades, and must I repeat to you—

VAL. Why, uncle, is it possible you have never read Homer?

VAN B. (*sitting down again.*) Well, suppose I have?

VAL. You talk to me of marriage;—I simply cite the example of antiquity's most famous husband.

VAN B. I don't care to hear your proverbs. Will you answer me seriously?

VAL. Be it so. Let us deal plainly. But I shall never make you understand me as long as you insist on interrupting. I have not quoted Menelaus to make a parade of my learning, but to avoid mentioning a great many respectable people of our own times. Must I explain myself without reserve?

VAN B. Yes, on the spot, or I am going.

VAL. I was sixteen years old, just leaving college, when, for the first time, a fair lady of our acquaintance honored me with her distinguished favor. At that age, can one tell the difference between right and wrong? One evening I was at this lady's house, sitting by the fire; her husband was present. Suddenly he rose and said he was going out. Upon this, there passed between my beauty

and me a rapid glance, which made my heart leap. We were to be alone together? I turned round and saw the poor man putting on his gloves. They were greenish buckskin gloves, too large for him, and rather worn at the thumbs. While he was plunging his hands into them, standing there in the middle of the room, an imperceptible smile played over the corners of his wife's lips, and faintly marked, as it were a shadow, the two dimples on her cheeks. Only a lover's eye sees smiles like that, for they are to be felt rather than seen. That one went straight into my soul; I gobbled it up like a sugar-plum. But, strangely enough, the remembrance of that delightful moment became inextricably linked with that of two fat red hands flapping about inside a pair of greenish gloves, and those hands, in their confiding wriggings, had something so indefinably piteous that whenever I think of them, that feminine smile begins to play over the corner of my lips; and I have sworn that no woman on earth shall ever glove me with those gloves.

VAN B. That is to say that, as an avowed libertine, you disbelieve in the virtue of women, and fear that others will do to you as you have done to others.

VAL. You have said it : I fear the devil, and do not wish to be *gloved*.

VAN B. Bah ! A young man's notion !

VAL. As you please. It is my notion. In thirty years' time it will be an old man's notion, for I shall never marry.

VAN B. Do you pretend that all wives are false and all husbands deceived ?

VAL. I pretend nothing,—know nothing about it. I pretend, when I go into the streets, not to throw myself under the wheels of the carriages ; when I dine, not to eat coal-fish ; when I am thirsty, not to drink out of a broken glass ; and when I see a woman, not to marry her ; and yet I am not sure but that I may be run over, or choked, or have my mouth cut, or—

VAN B. For shame ! Mlle. de Mantes is virtuous and well brought up ; she is a good little girl.

VAL. God forbid that I should question it ! No doubt she is the best maiden in the world. You say she is well brought up. What education has she received ? Is she taken to balls, theatres, horse-races ? Does she go out alone in a cab at noon to return home at six ? Has she a clever maid and a secret staircase ? Has she seen "*La Tour de Nesle*," and does she read the novels of M.

de Balzac? Do they take her, after a good dinner, on summer evenings, when the wind is in the south, to see ten or twelve broad-shouldered athletes performing in the Champs Elysées? Has she for an instructor a big curly-headed fellow, with a fine leg, who waltzes beautifully and squeezes her fingers after she has been drinking punch? Does she receive visitors alone in the afternoon, sitting on a soft springy sofa in the dim light of pink window-blinds? Has she a little gilded knob by her door, which she can touch with her little finger as she turns her head aside and a thick hanging falls softly and deadens every sound? Does she put her glove into her glass when the champagne comes round? Does she make a pretence of going to the Opera ball only to be lost sight of for fifteen minutes, drop in at Musard's, and come home to yawn? Have they taught her to turn up the whites of her eyes like an amorous dove, when Rubini is singing? Does she pass the summer in the country with a lady of great experience, in whom her family have implicit confidence, who, in the evening, leaves her at the piano and goes out to stroll under the hedges, whispering with a hussar? Does she go to watering-places? Does she suffer from headaches?

VAN B. In God's name, what are you talking about?

VAL. Why, if she knows nothing of all this, they have not taught her much; for, as soon as she becomes a wife, she will learn it all, and then,—who can foresee—?

VAN B. You have strange ideas on the education of women; would you like to see them carried out?

VAL. No, but I would like a young girl to be a herb in the woods, not a plant in a jardinière. Come, uncle, let us go to the Tuilleries, and stop talking of this.

VAN B. You refuse Mlle. de Mantes?

VAL. No more than Mademoiselle any one else,—neither more nor less.

VAN B. You will make me swear; you are incorrigible. I had the fairest hopes,—the girl will be rich some day. You will ruin me and go to the devil,—that will be the end of it.—What is it? What do you want?

VAL. To give you your hat and cane, and go out with you for an airing, if you have no objection.

VAN B. Much I care for an airing!—See here, if you refuse to marry, I disinherit you.

VAL. You disinherit me, uncle?

VAN B. Yes, by Heaven! I take my oath to it! I will be as obstinate as you,

and we shall see which of us will give in first.

VAL. You disinherit me in writing, or only by word of mouth?

VAN B. In writing, insolent puppy!

VAL. And to whom will you leave your fortune? Are you going to found a prize for virtue, or a Latin Grammar competition?

VAN B. Sooner than be ruined by you, I will ruin myself on my own account and at my own pleasure.

VAL. There is no lottery now, there are no gambling-tables; you will never be able to drink it all.

VAN B. I will leave Paris, return to Antwerp, and marry myself, if necessary, and you shall soon have six cousins-german.

VAL. And I will go to Algiers, turn trumpeter of dragoons, marry an Ethiopian, and present you with twenty-four grand-nephews as black as ink and as stupid as owls.

VAN B. Upon my life!—If I take my cane—

VAL. Be careful, uncle, or you may break the staff of your old age.

VAN B. (*embracing him.*) Ah, you young wretch! You impose upon me.

VAL. Now listen to me. I have a horror

of marriage, but, to oblige you, my good uncle, I will make up my mind to anything. However strange what I am going to propose to you may seem, promise me to agree to it without reserve, and, on my side, I pledge you my word.

VAN B. What are you driving at now? Be quick.

VAL. Give me your promise first, and I will speak afterwards.

VAN B. I can't promise before I know.

VAL. You must, uncle; it is indispensable.

VAN B. Very well;—I promise.

VAL. If you wish me to marry Mlle. de Mantes, there is only one way; and that is, to make me certain that she will never put on my hands those gloves we were talking about.

VAN B. And how can I know?

VAL. In a case like this there are probabilities which may easily be calculated. Do you grant that if I were sure her virtue could not stand a week's siege, I should be very foolish to marry her—?

VAN B. Certainly. But what appearance is there—?

VAL. I ask you for no longer delay. The Baroness has never seen me, neither has her

daughter. You will set off at once and pay them a visit. You will say that, to your great regret, your nephew is determined to remain single. I will arrive at the château half-an-hour after you, and you will take care not to recognize me. That is all I ask of you ; the rest shall be my affair.

VAN B. But you alarm me. What do you intend to do? How will you gain admission?

VAL. That is my business. Don't recognize me,—that is all I have to tell you. I shall spend a week at the château ; I need a change of air, and it will do me good. You may stay longer if you like.

VAN B. Are you going out of your senses? What do you mean to attempt? To overcome a young girl's principles in a week? To play the gallant under an assumed name? A wonderful novelty indeed! Why, that sort of folly is told over and over again in every fairy-tale. Do you take me for the regular stage-uncle?

VAL. It is two o'clock,—time for you to go home. Come, uncle, come. [*They go out.*]

SCENE II.—AT THE CHÂTEAU.

THE BARONESS, CÉCILE, an ABBÉ, a DANCING-MASTER.

(*The BARONESS is seated, chatting with the ABBÉ and working at some embroidery. CÉCILE is taking her dancing-lesson.*)

BARONESS. It is very strange I cannot find my ball of blue silk.

ABBÉ. You had it a quarter of an hour ago ; it must have rolled away somewhere.

DANCING-MASTER. If Mademoiselle will dance the *poule* once more we will then rest a little.

CÉCILE. I want to learn the *valse à deux temps*.

D.M. Madame la Baronne objects to it. Be so good as to turn your head and make the *oppositions* to me.

ABBÉ. What did you think, Madame, of that last sermon ? Did you hear it ?

BAR. It is green and pink on a black ground, like the little chair upstairs.

ABBÉ. I beg your pardon ?

BAR. I beg yours ;—I was not attending.

ABBÉ. I thought I saw you there.

BAR. Where ?

ABBÉ. At Saint-Roch, last Sunday.

BAR. Oh yes! Very nice. Everybody was crying; the Baron did nothing but blow his nose. I went out before it was half over because my neighbor used so much scent, and I am undergoing homœopathic treatment.

D-M. Mademoiselle, I must tell you again, you do not make the *oppositions*. Turn your head slightly, and put your arms round me.

CÉCILE. But I must look before me, if I don't want to fall down.

D-M.—Tut, tut, tut! This is dreadful! See now;—can anything be simpler? Look at me; do I fall? You go to the right, you look to the left;—you go to the left, you look to the right; nothing can be more natural.

BAR. It is an inconceivable thing how I can have lost that blue silk.

CÉCILE. Mamma, why don't you wish me to learn the *valse à deux temps*?

BAR. Because it is indecent.—Have you read *Jocelyn*?

ABBÉ. Yes, Madame; there are some fine verses in it, but the groundwork, I confess,—

BAR. The ground is black, so is the whole piece. It is to be mounted in ebony.

CÉCILE. But, mamma, Miss Clary waltzes, and the Mesdemoiselles de Raimbaut waltz!

BAR. Abbé, I am sure you must be sitting on—Miss Clary? Miss Clary is English, Mademoiselle.

ABBÉ. I, Madame? I sit on Miss Clary?

BAR. On my silk ;—there it is ;—no, that is the red. Where has it got to?

ABBÉ. I think that scene with the Bishop very fine ; there certainly is genius in it,—great power and facility.

CÉCILE. But, mamma, why is it decent for her to waltz on account of her being English?

BAR. There is another novel I have been reading, that they sent me from Mongie's. I forget the name now, and I forget what it was about. Have you read it? It is very well written.

ABBÉ. Yes, Madame. I think there is some one at the gate. Are you expecting a visitor?

BAR. Ah! To be sure! Cécile, come here.

D-M. Mademoiselle, Madame la Baronne wishes to speak to you.

ABBÉ. I see no carriage. There are some post-horses going out.

CÉCILE (*coming to her mother*). Did you call me, mamma?

BAR. No. Oh, yes! There is some-

body coming. Stoop down, I want to whisper in your ear.—It is a chance for you. Is your hair tidy?

CÉCILE. A chance for me?

BAR. Yes, a very desirable person.—Twenty-five to thirty or younger.—No, I know nothing about him; never mind, go on with your dancing.

CÉCILE. But, mamma, I wanted to tell you—

BAR. It is incredible how that ball of silk can have gone. I only had one blue, and it must needs get lost. [*Enter VAN BUCK.*

VAN BUCK. Baroness, your humble servant. My nephew has been unable to come with me; he has begged me to express his regret and to apologize for his failure to keep his word.

BAR. Dear me! So he really is not coming? There is my daughter taking her lesson; do you mind her continuing? I made her come down here because her rooms are so small.

VAN B. I hope I am not disturbing anybody. If my crazy nephew—

BAR. Will you take anything? No? Sit down then. And how are you?

VAN B. My nephew, Madame, is very sorry—

BAR. Please, do wait—Abbé, you will stay, won't you? Well, Cécile, what is the matter?

D-M. Mademoiselle is fatigued, Madame.

BAR. Fiddlededee! If she were at a ball, and it were four o'clock in the morning, she would not be fatigued, I know. Now, tell me [*to VAN BUCK*], has he failed you?

VAN B. I am afraid so; and, to tell the whole truth—

BAR. Bah! He declines! Well, this is a pretty business!

VAN B. Good Heavens, Madame! Please do not think that I am to blame in any way. I swear to you by the soul of my father—

BAR. But he declines, is it not so? Our plan has failed?

VAN B. Madame, if I could, without falsehood,—

[*An uproar is heard outside.*]

BAR. What is it? Look, Abbé, look!

ABBÉ. Madame, it is a carriage upset in front of your door. They are bringing in a young man who seems to be senseless.

BAR. *Mon Dieu!* A corpse coming into the house! Let them prepare the green room. Come, Van Buck, give me your arm.

[*They go out.*]

ACT II.—SCENE I.—A WALK BY THE
SIDE OF A HIGH HEDGE.

*Enter VALENTIN and VAN BUCK, the former
with his arm in a sling.*

VAN B. Is it possible, you unhappy boy, that you have really dislocated your arm ?

VAL. Nothing is more possible ; it is even probable, and, what is more, painfully real.

VAN B. I don't know which of us two is more to blame in this affair. Did any one ever see such a piece of madness ?

VAL. I had to find a pretext to introduce myself in a fitting manner. How can one present oneself thus *incognito* in a respectable family ? I gave my postilion a louis and made him promise to upset me in front of the château. He is an honest man ; there is nothing to be said against him, and his money was fairly earned. He drove that wheel into the ditch with heroic fortitude. I dislocated my arm, that was my fault ; but I was upset, and have nothing to complain of. On the contrary, I am well satisfied ; it gives things an air of reality which tells in my favor.

VAN B. And what are you going to do ? What are your intentions ?

VAL. I have not come here, by any means, to marry Mlle. de Mantes, but only to prove that I should be a fool to do so. My plan is laid, my battery is in position, and, so far, everything goes on marvellously well. You have stood to your promise like a Regulus or an Hernani. You have not called me nephew, that is the chief, and most difficult, point. Here I am, received, entertained, lodged in a fine green room, with orange-water on my table and white curtains on my bed. It is only justice to your Baroness to say that she has received me as well as my postilion upset me. Now, the question is whether everything else will be as satisfactory. I propose, first of all, to make my declaration; secondly, to write a love-letter—

VAN B. It is useless; I will not suffer this ugly joke to go any further.

VAL. You take back your word! As you please; I take mine back too, on the spot.

VAN B. But, nephew—

VAL. Only say the word and I start for Paris;—no bargain no marriage; you shall disinherit me if you please.

VAN B. This is an abominable hornet's nest, and it is an unheard-of thing that I

should have got myself into it. But go on, let us see,—explain yourself.

VAL. Uncle, think of our treaty. You said and conceded to me that, should it be established that my intended would make me wear certain gloves, I should be a madman to make her my wife. Consequently, the experiment once admitted, you will see it to be good, just, and fitting that it should be as complete as possible. What I say shall be well said, what I attempt well attempted, and what I succeed in doing well done. You shall not catch me cheating, and in any case, I have *carte blanche*.

VAN B. But surely there are certain limits, certain things—I beg you to observe that, if you prevail,—Mercy on us ! How reckless !

VAL. If our intended is as you believe her and have represented her to me, there is not the least danger, and her dignity can only be the gainer. Just suppose that I am some chance gallant ; I am the lover of Mademoiselle de Mantes, virtuous spouse of Valentin Van Buck ; think how audacious and reckless are the young men of our time ! What will they not do when they love ! What climbings up to windows, what letters of four pages, what boxes of sugar-plums ! What will turn a lover aside ? For what can he

be called to account? What wrong can he do? What ground for offence can he give? He loves. O Uncle Van Buck, think of the time when you loved.

VAN B. At all times I have been decent, and I hope you will be, or I shall tell the Baroness everything.

VAL. I propose to do nothing which can shock any one. I propose, in the first place, to make a declaration; secondly, to write several notes; thirdly, to make friends with the lady's-maid; fourthly, to hang about in corners; fifthly, to take impressions of sundry keys on sealing-wax; sixthly, to make a rope-ladder and cut the window-panes with my diamond ring; seventhly, to kneel down and recite selections from "*la Nouvelle Héloïse*"; and eighthly, if I fail, to go and drown myself in the ornamental water. But I swear to you I will be decent, and not utter a single ugly word or anything that could wound the proprieties.

VAN B. You are a shameless debauchee; I will permit no such thing.

VAL. But consider; in four years, if I marry Mlle. de Mantes, some one else will be doing all that I have just told you; and how am I to know how far she is capable of resistance unless I first make trial of her my-

self? Some one else will try her still harder and will have more time to do it in. In asking only a week I have shown great moderation.

VAN B. It is a trap that you have laid for me ; I never foresaw all this.

VAL. And what did you think you foresaw when you accepted my wager ?

VAN B. Why, my friend, I supposed—I thought—I thought you were going to court,—but politely,—to court this young person,—to say, for instance,—to say to her.—Or even perhaps—And yet I know nothing about it—But, devil take it ! You are something dreadful !

VAL. Stop ! Here is the fair Cécile coming tripping towards us. Don't you hear the crackling of the dry twigs ? Mamma is embroidering with her Abbé. Quick ! Bury yourself in the hedge ! You shall be a witness of the first skirmish, and give me your opinion.

VAN B. You will marry her if she receives you badly ? *[Hides himself in the hedge.]*

VAL. Leave me alone, and don't stir. I am delighted to have you for a spectator, and the enemy is turning the corner. As you have called me a madman I wish to show you that, when it comes to extravagances, the

further you push them the better. You are going to see what wounds received for the sake of beauty will do when joined to a little address. Observe my pensive walk, and be kind enough to say whether this damaged arm doesn't become me. Well, you see, just let a man look pale—nothing in the world like it.

“ Un jeune malade, à pas lents ”—

Above all, no noise ! Now is the critical moment. Respect your oath ! I am going to sit down beneath a tree, like a shepherd of old.

[*Enter CÉCILE, with a book in her hand.*

VAL. Risen already, Mademoiselle, and alone in the wood at this hour ?

CÉCILE. It is you, Monsieur ? I didn't recognize you. How is your sore arm ?

VAL. (*aside.*) *Sore arm !* What a hideous word ! (*aloud.*) You are too kind to me ; but there are some wounds which one never more than half feels.

CÉCILE. Have they brought you your breakfast ?

VAL. You are too good ; of all the virtues of your sex hospitality is the least known, and nowhere is it to be found in such sweet and precious perfection as with

you. If the interest in me which has been shown—

CÉCILE. I will go and tell them to bring you some broth. [She goes.

VAN B. (*coming out of the hedge.*) You will marry her! You will marry her! Confess that she is perfect. What *naïveté*! What divine modesty! It would be impossible to make a better choice.

VAL. One moment, uncle, one moment! You are going to work rather too fast.

VAN B. Why not? What more do you want? You see clearly whom you have to deal with, and it will always be the same. How happy you will be with such a wife! Come! Let us go and tell the Baroness everything; I undertake to appease her.

VAL. *Broth!* How can a young girl utter such a word? I don't like her; she is ugly and stupid—Good-bye, uncle; I am going back to Paris.

VAN B. Are you joking? What of your promise? Am I to be thus made sport of? What is the meaning of these downcast eyes and this dejected look? Does it mean that you take me for a libertine after your own fashion, and avail yourself of my foolish complacency as a cloak for your villainous designs? Was it really only a crime that

you came here to attempt under pretence of testing her principles? God's light! If I thought so—

VAL. I don't like her; it is not my fault, and I never answered for it.

VAN B. And what is there in her that you don't like? She is pretty, or I am blind. She has long, well-opened eyes, superb hair, a tolerable figure. She is perfectly educated,—knows English and Italian;—she will have, some day, an income of thirty thousand francs, and a very handsome dowry in the mean time. What have you to say against her? What reason have you to give for refusing her?

VAL. There never is any reason to give for people's likes or dislikes. It is certain that she is distasteful to me,—with her "*sore arm*" and her "*broth.*"

VAN B. It is your self-love that suffers. If I had not been there you would have come and told me a hundred stories about your first interview, and bragged about your fine prospects. You imagined that you would make a conquest in the twinkling of an eye. That is where the shoe pinches. You were well enough pleased with her yesterday evening, before you had talked to her, when she and her mother were taking

so much trouble to tend you and your Tom-fool's wound. Now you find her ugly because she pays you hardly any attention. I know you better than you think, and I won't give in so quickly. I forbid you to leave this place.

VAL. As you please. I will have nothing to do with her. I repeat, I think her downright plain ; she has an idiotic air which is revolting. Her eyes are large, it is true, but meaningless ; her hair is good, but she has a flat forehead ; as for her figure, it is, perhaps, the best thing about her, although you only thought it tolerable. I congratulate her on knowing Italian,—perhaps she is wittier in Italian than in French. As to her dowry, let her keep it, I don't want it,—any more than I want her *broth*.

VAN B. Can any one conceive such a crackbrain ? Would any one expect such a thing as this ? Be off with you ! What I said yesterday was nothing but the truth. You are only fit to dream of fiddle-faddle and rubbish, and I will trouble myself no more about you. Go and marry your wash-erwoman, if you like. Since you refuse to take your fortune when you have it in your hands, let chance take care of you ;—look for it in the bottom of your dice-boxes.

God is my witness that, for three years, my patience has been such as, perhaps, no other man—

VAL. Am I mistaken?—Look, uncle ; it seems to me that she is coming back this way. Yes, I see her between the trees, she is coming back into the coppice.

VAN B. Where ? What ? What do you say ?

VAL. Don't you see a white dress behind those lilac-bushes ? I am not mistaken, it is really she. Quick, uncle, get back into the hedge, or we shall be surprised together.

VAN B. What is the good, if you don't like her ?

VAL. Never mind ; I want to make another attempt, so that you may not say I have decided too hastily.

VAN B. You will marry her, if she perseveres ?

[He hides again.]

VAL. Sh ! No noise ; here she comes.

CÉCILE (*entering.*) Monsieur, my mother has charged me to ask you if you intend leaving us to-day ?

VAL. Yes, Mademoiselle, that is my intention, and I have ordered horses.

CÉCILE. Because they are going to play whist, and my mother would be much obliged if you would make a fourth.

VAL. I am sorry, but I don't know how to play.

CÉCILE. And if you would stay to dinner, we have a pheasant and truffles.

VAL. Thank you ; I never eat pheasant and truffles.

CÉCILE. After dinner there are some people coming, and we shall dance the mazurka.

VAL. Pray excuse me ; I never dance.

CÉCILE. That is a great pity. Adieu, Monsieur. [Cécile goes.]

VAN B. (*coming out again.*) There now ! Will you marry her ? What is the meaning of all this ? You say you have ordered horses ; is that true ? or are you mocking me ?

VAL. You were right, she is a nice girl ; I like her better than I did before ; she has a little mark at the corner of her mouth which I had not noticed.

VAN B. What are you after now ? What has come over you ? Will you answer me seriously ?

VAL. I am after nothing in particular, only taking a walk with you. You don't think her bad-looking, do you ?

VAN B. I ? God forbid ! I think her perfect in every way.

VAL. It seems to me very early for whist ;

do you play, uncle? You ought to go into the house.

VAN B. Certainly I ought. I am waiting until you deign to answer me. Are you going to remain here,—yes or no?

VAL. If I remain, it is for the sake of our wager; I should not like to be wanting in that matter. But don't count on anything for the present; my arm is putting me to torture.

VAN B. Let us go in, you must rest.

VAL. Yes, I am longing to taste that broth that is awaiting me, and I have some writing to do. I shall see you again at dinner.

VAN B. Writing! I hope it is not to her you are going to write.

VAL. If I write to her, it is for the sake of our wager. You know it is part of the agreement.

VAN B. I protest formally;—at least, unless you show me your letter.

VAL. I don't mind. I have told you, and I repeat it, that I like her pretty well.

VAN B. Where is the necessity for writing? Why did you not make your declaration just now, by word of mouth, as you had promised?

VAL. Why?

VAN B. Certainly; what was there to hinder you? You had the finest courage in the world.

VAL. It was because my arm was hurting me. Wait! There she is again. Do you see her down there in the alley?

VAN B. She is turning round the flower-bed, and the hedge is circular. That doesn't look like coming back here.

VAL. Ah! You little coquette! She is circling round the flame, like a giddy moth. I am going to toss up to see whether I shall love her or not.

VAN B. Try to make her love you first; the rest will be easier.

VAL. Very well, then. Let us both watch her well. She is going to pass between those two clumps of trees. If she turns her head this way I love her; if not, I'm off to Paris.

VAN B. I bet she doesn't turn back.

VAL. Yes, she will. Don't lose sight of her.

VAN B. You are right—No, not yet. She seems to be reading attentively.

VAL. I am sure she will turn back.

VAN B. No, she is keeping on. She is nearing the clump of trees. I am convinced she will do nothing of the kind.

VAL. But she must see us; there is

nothing to hide us. I tell you she will turn back.

VAN B. She has passed. You have lost.

VAL. I am going to write to her, as sure as I live ! I must know what I have to expect. It is absurd that a little girl should treat people so slightly ! Pure hypocrisy ! Nothing but trickery ! I am going to send her a letter in regular form. I will tell her that I am dying of love for her, that if she repulses me I will blow out my brains, and that if she will have me I will run away with her to-morrow morning. Come, let us go in. I will write in your presence.

VAN B. Softly, nephew ! What are you at now ? You are going to play us some wicked trick here.

VAL. Do you think, then, that two casual words can signify anything ? What have I said to her beyond the most indifferent trifles, and what has she said to me ? It is plain that she had no cause for turning round. She knows nothing and I have been able to say nothing to her. I am a fool, if you like. Perhaps I am piqued ; perhaps my self-esteem is at stake. Pretty or plain, I want to see into her soul. There is some scheme at the bottom of it, some piece of obstinacy we

know nothing about. Leave me to act, and all shall be made clear.

VAN B. The devil take me if you don't talk like a lover. Are you in love, by any chance?

VAL. No. I have told you that I do not like her. Must I tell you the same thing a hundred times? Let us hurry back to the house.

VAN B. I have told you that I will have no letters; and, above all, such as you speak of.

VAL. Come, all the same. We will settle it in the house. *[They go in.]*

ACT II. SCENE II.—THE SALON.

The BARONESS and the ABBÉ before a table prepared for playing cards.

BARONESS. Say what you like, it is dreadfully dull playing with a dummy. I hate the country just for that reason.

ABBÉ. But where is M. Van Buck? Has he not come down yet?

BAR. I saw him just now in the park with the gentleman of the broken-down carriage, who, by the way, is very impolite not to wish to stay for dinner.

ABBÉ. I suppose he has pressing business—

BAR. Bah ! Business ! Everybody has business. A fine excuse that ! If people only thought of business they would never do anything. Stay though ! Abbé, let us play piquet. I feel in a horribly bad humor.

ABBÉ (*shuffling*). There is no doubt that the young men of these days care little for politeness.

BAR. Politeness ! I should think not. Have they any idea of it ? And then, what is politeness ? My coachman is polite. In my time, Abbé, gentlemen were gallant.

ABBÉ. As it should be, Baroness, as it should be ; and would to heaven I had been born in those days !

BAR. I should have liked to see my brother, who was in the Household of Monsieur, falling out of a carriage in front of a château, and staying there for the night. He would have forfeited everything he had, sooner than refuse to make a fourth. But let us not talk about these things. It is your draw ; do you leave me any cards ?

ABBÉ. I haven't an ace. Here is M. Van Buck. [Enter VAN BUCK.

BAR. Go on ; it is your turn to speak.

VAN BUCK (*to the BARONESS in a low voice*).
Madame, I have to say a few words to you,
which are of the utmost importance.

BAR. Very well ! After we have counted
this hand.

ABBÉ. Five cards—forty-five.

BAR: No good. [*To VAN BUCK.*] Well,
what is it ?

VAN B. I implore you to grant me one
moment ; I cannot speak before a third per-
son, and what I have to tell you will bear no
delay.

BAR. (*rising.*) You frighten me ; what is
it about ?

VAN B. Madame, it is a serious matter,
and you will, perhaps, be angry with me.
Necessity compels me to break a promise
which my imprudence induced me to make.
The young man to whom you extended your
hospitality last night is my nephew.

BAR. What an idea !

VAN B. He desired to approach you with-
out being known. I thought it no harm to
lend myself to a whim, which, in a case like
this, is not without precedent.

BAR. I have seen much worse pranks !

VAN B. But I ought to warn you that,
at this moment, he has just finished writing
to Mlle. de Mantes a letter couched in the

most unrestrained language. Neither my threats nor my prayers could turn him from this act of folly ; and one of your servants, I say it with regret, has taken upon herself to deliver the note. It is a declaration of love, and one, I must add, of the most extravagant character.

BAR. Indeed ? Well ! I see no great harm in that. That young man of yours has his wits about him.

VAN B. I should think so, Madame ! And it is not only since yesterday that I have known of it. In short, Madame, it is for you to devise means to avert the evil consequences of these proceedings. You are in your own house ;—and, as for me, I declare my breath is taken away, and I feel as if I must drop. Oh ! [*He falls into a chair.*]

BAR. Heavens ! What is the matter with you ! You are as white as a sheet ! Quick ! Tell me all that has happened ; give me your entire confidence.

VAN B. I have told you all ; there is nothing more to add.

BAR. Bah ! If that is all, you need have no fear. If your nephew has written to Cécile, the child will show me his note.

VAN B. Are you sure of that, Baroness ? It is dangerous.

BAR. A pretty question ! Where should we be if a daughter would not show her own mother the letters she receives ?

VAN B. Hm ! I wouldn't stake my life on it.

BAR. What do you mean by that, Monsieur Van Buck ? Do you know to whom you are speaking ? Where have you lived that you should raise such a doubt as that ? I know but little of the manners of these days, or of how you bourgeois live ;—but, upon my life ! we have had enough of this. There comes my daughter now, and you shall see that she will bring me her letter Come, Abbé, let us continue.

ABBÉ. Forty-five won't do ?

BAR. No. You have nothing.—Fourteen of aces, six and fifteen,—that makes ninety-five. Now it is your turn.

ABBÉ. Clubs. I see I shall lose every trick.

VAN B. (*aside to the BARONESS.*) I observe that Mademoiselle Cécile has not yet taken you into her confidence.

BAR. (*aside to VAN BUCK.*) You don't know what you are talking about. She feels shy in the Abbé's presence. I am as sure of her as I am of myself. (*Aloud.*) I make a repeek, that's all. A hundred and seventeen left over. Your turn.

A SERVANT (*entering*). M. l'Abbé, you are wanted : it is the Sacristan and the village Beadle.

ABBÉ. What do they want ? I am busy.

BAR. Give your cards to Van Buck ; he will play this hand for you.

[*The ABBÉ goes, and VAN BUCK takes his place.*

It is your deal, I have cut. You are marked, I think. What is the matter with your fingers ?

VAN B. (*in a low voice.*) I confess that I am not at my ease ; your daughter says nothing, and I don't see my nephew.

BAR. I tell you, I answer for her ; it is you who embarrass her ; I can see her from here making signs to me.

VAN B. You think so ? I see nothing.

BAR. Cécile, come here a little ; you are sitting a mile off.

[*CÉCILE comes to her mother's chair.*

Have you nothing to tell me, my dear ?

CÉCILE. I ! No, Mamma.

BAR. Tut ! I have only four cards, Van Buck ; it is your point. I have three knaves.

VAN B. Shall I leave you by yourselves ?

BAR. No ; stay here ; it makes no difference. Cécile, you may speak before M. Van Buck.

CÉCILE. I, Mamma? I have nothing to tell you.

BAR. Don't you want to speak to me about something?

CÉCILE. No, Mamma.

BAR. It is inconceivable. What is it that you have been telling me, Van Buck?

VAN B. Madame, I have told you the truth.

BAR. That is impossible. Cécile has nothing to tell me; it is clear that she has received nothing.

VAN B. (*rising.*) *Morbleu!* I saw it with my own eyes.

BAR. (*also rising.*) My daughter, what is the meaning of this? Stand up and look me in the face. What have you got in your pocket?

CÉCILE (*beginning to cry.*) Mamma, it is not my fault.—It was that gentleman who wrote to me.

BAR. Let me see. [CÉCILE *gives her the letter.*] I feel some curiosity about the epistolary style of "that gentleman." [*She reads.*]

"Mademoiselle, I am dying of love for you. I saw you last winter, and, knowing that you were in the country, I resolved to see you again or die. I gave a louis to my postilion—" Perhaps he wants us to pay it him back. How

important it is that we should know about that louis ! “ —to my postilion to upset me before your gate. I met you twice this morning and could say nothing to you, so much does your presence disturb me ! Meanwhile, the fear of losing you and the necessity of leaving your house ”—I like that ! Who asked him to go ? It was he who refused to stay for dinner. “ —prompt me to ask you for a *rendez-vous*. I know that I have no claim to your confidence ”—A very true remark, and highly appropriate !—“ but love excuses everything. This evening, at nine o'clock, during the ball, I shall be hidden in the wood. Every one here will believe me gone, for I shall leave the château in a carriage before dinner; but only to go four paces or so and then alight—” Four paces or so ! The avenue is longer than that. Any one would think it would be enough for him just to get into his carriage ! “ —and then alight. If you can make your escape this evening I await you; if not I blow out my brains ”—Good ! “ —brains. I believe that your mother ”—Eh ! What about your mother ? Let us see. “ —pays little attention to you. She has a head like a weath—”

Monsieur Van Buck, what does this mean ?

VAN B. I did not hear, Madame.

BAR. Read it yourself, and do me the favor to tell your nephew to get out of my house, and never set foot in it again.

VAN B. It is "*weathercock*," that is certain ; I had not noticed it. And yet he read me the letter before sealing it.

BAR. He read you that letter, and you allowed him to give it to one of my servants ? Go ! You are an old fool, and I will never see you again as long as I live.

[*She goes out. The rolling of a carriage is heard.*

VAN B. What's that ? My nephew going without me ? How does he expect me to go ? I have sent away my horses. I shall have to run after him. [*He goes out, running.*

CÉCILE (*alone*). It is strange ! Why did he write to me when everybody wants us to be married ?

ACT III. SCENE I.—A ROAD.

VAN BUCK *and* VALENTIN *knocking at the door of an Inn.*

VAL. Halloa ! Is there any one there who can do an errand for me ?

WAITER (*coming out of the door*). Yes, monsieur, if it isn't too far. You see it's raining by the bucketful.

VAN B. I oppose it with all my authority, and in the name of the laws of the kingdom.

VAL. Do you know the château de Mantes, near here ?

WAITER. Oh yes, monsieur ! We go there every day. It is on the left ; you can see it from here.

VAN B. My friend, if you have any sense of right and wrong. I forbid you to go there.

VAL. There are two louis for you to earn. Here is a letter for Mlle. de Mantes which you will give to her maid, and to no one else, privately. Make haste and come back.

WAITER. Don't you be afraid, monsieur.

VAN B. Here are four louis if you refuse to go.

WAITER. Monseigneur ! There is no fear.

VAL. Here are ten ; and if you don't go I will break my cane over your back !

WAITER. Make yourself easy, your highness ! I shall soon be back !

VAL. Now, uncle, let us take shelter, and let me recommend a glass of beer. That foot-race must have fatigued you.

VAN B. You may be sure I will not let you out of my sight. I swear it by the soul of my late brother and by the light of day ! As long as I have legs to carry me and a

head on my shoulders I will oppose these infamous proceedings and their horrible consequences.

VAL. Be assured I will not desist from my undertaking. I swear it by my just indignation and by the darkness of night which protects me ! As long as I have ink and paper and a louis in my pocket I will pursue and attain my object whatever may be the result.

VAN B. Have you, then, neither good faith nor shame, and is it possible that you are of my blood ? What ! Can neither respect for innocence, nor sense of propriety, nor the certainty of giving me a fever,—can nothing touch you ?

VAL. Have you, then, neither pride nor shame, and is it possible that you are my uncle ? What ! Can neither the insult that has been offered us, nor the manner in which we have been hunted from this château, nor the opprobrious things said to you in your very face,—can nothing arouse your spirit ?

VAN B. If you were even in love ! If I could believe that all these extravagances proceed from a motive having something human in it ! But no, you are only a Lovelace, you breathe only treachery, and the most detestable vengeance is all you thirst for and your only love.

VAL. If I could only hear you swear ! If I could persuade myself that at the bottom of your heart you were sending this Baroness and all her people to the devil ! But no ; you are only afraid of the rain, you think only of the bad weather, and the care of your dyed stockings is your only anxiety and your only torment.

VAN B. How true it is that our first transgression leads us to a precipice ! Who could have predicted this morning, when the barber shaved me and I put on my new coat, that, this evening, I should be in a barn, covered with mud and wet to the bones ! What ! Is this I ? Great God ! Must I, at my age, leave the chaise, in which we were so comfortably installed, to run across country after a madman ? Must I follow at his heels like the confidant in a tragedy, and the result of all this be only the ruin of my fair name ?

VAL. On the contrary, it is by retreat that we should be dishonoring ourselves, not by a glorious campaign from which we shall only return as conquerors. Blush, Uncle Van Buck, but let it be a blush of noble indignation ! You call me Lovelace ; and, by Heaven ! the name becomes me. On me, as on him, have they shut a gate surmounted by a proud escutcheon ; me, like him, does a

hated family think to cast down by insult ; like him,—like the hawk,—I wander and wheel about the dovecote, but, like him, I will seize my prey, and, like Clarissa, the sublimely haughty prude, my beloved one shall be mine !

VAN B. Good heavens ! Why am I not at Antwerp, seated on my leather chair, before my counter, unrolling my silks ? Why did not my brother die a bachelor, instead of marrying when he was over forty ? Or, rather, why did I not die the first day the Baroness de Mantes invited me to dinner ?

VAL. Nay, regret only the moment when a fatal weakness prompted you to reveal to that woman the secret of our compact. It is you who are the cause of the evil ; cease reproaching me, who am about to repair it. Have you any doubt that this young lady, who hides love-letters so well in the pocket of her apron, would have come to the rendez-vous ? Surely she would ; all the more, then, will she come this time. By my Patron Saint ! How I shall enjoy seeing her come, in dressing-gown, slippers, and mob-cap, from that great old rusty brick barrack ! I have no love for her ; but, did I love her, my revenge would be the stronger and kill love in my heart. I swear that she shall be my

mistress, but never my wife. There is now neither trial, nor promise, nor alternative for me, but they shall forever remember in that family the day on which they drove me from it.

INNKEEPER (*coming out of the house*).
Gentlemen, the sun is beginning to be low ; will you not do me the honor to dine in my house ?

VAL. To be sure we will. Bring us the bill-of-fare, and have a fire lighted. As soon as your man comes back you will tell him to bring me the answer. Come, uncle ; show a little courage ; come and order dinner.

VAN B. The wine will be abominable ; I know the country ; it will be some frightful vinegar.

INNKEEPER. I beg your pardon. We have champagne, burgundy, and all that you can wish.

VAN B. I daresay, in a hole like this ! It is impossible. You are imposing on us.

INNKEEPER. The coaches stop here, and you shall see that we are not so badly provided.

VAN B. Well then, let us try and dine. I feel that my end is approaching, and that soon I shall dine no more.

[*They go into the inn.*

SCENE II.—A ROOM IN THE CHÂTEAU.

The BARONESS and the ABBÉ.

BARONESS. God be praised ! My daughter is safely locked up. I believe I shall be ill after this.

ABBÉ. Madame, if I may venture to tender my advice, I must say that I feel considerable misgivings. I think I saw a man in a blouse crossing the courtyard ; he was a suspicious-looking person, and he had a letter in his hand.

BAR. The door is bolted ; there is nothing to fear. Help me a little about this ball ; I have not the strength to attend to it.

ABBÉ. Under the very grave circumstances could you not postpone it ?

BAR. Are you mad ? Do you expect me to bring the whole Faubourg Saint-Germain down here from Paris only to thank them for coming, and show them the door ? Think of what you are saying.

ABBÉ. I thought that, after what has happened, you could, without offending any one—

BAR. And, to add to my troubles, I have no candles ! Just see if Dupré is there.

ABBÉ. I think he is attending to the refreshments.

BAR. So he is ;—those horrid refreshments ! There is another thing that is enough to kill me. It is eight days since I wrote about them myself, and they only came an hour ago.

ABBÉ. That man in the blouse, Baroness, was an emissary, you may be sure. It seems to me, as well as I can remember, that one of your maids was talking to him. That young man who came here yesterday is a dangerous person, and, after the somewhat abrupt way in which you got rid of him,—

BAR. Bah ! Those Van Bucks ? Those linen-drapers ? What can *they* do ? If they wanted to raise a shout, what voice have they ? I must take the furniture out of the little salon ; I shall have nothing for the people to sit on.

ABBÉ. Is it in her own room that your daughter is locked, Madame ?

BAR. Ten and ten make twenty,—four Raimbaults,—twenty,—thirty. What do you say, Abbé ?

ABBÉ. I was asking, Baroness, if Mademoiselle Cécile is locked up in the yellow room ?

BAR. No, she is there, in the library. It

is still better so, I have her under my hand. I don't know what she is doing, or whether they are dressing her.—Here is my headache coming on again !

ABBÉ. Would you like me to go and talk to her ?

BAR. I tell you the door is bolted. What is done is done ; we can do nothing about it.

ABBÉ. I think it was her maid who was talking with that fellow. Let me beg of you to believe what I say ; there is some secret danger here which ought not to be neglected.

BAR. I must certainly go down to the butler's pantry ; this shall be the last time I receive in this place. [She goes out.

ABBÉ (*alone*). It seems to me I heard a noise in the next room. It couldn't be that girl ? Alas ! How thoughtless she is !

CÉCILE (*within*). Monsieur l'Abbé, please open the door.

ABBÉ. Mademoiselle, I cannot without due authority.

CÉCILE. The key is there, under the sofa-pillow ; you have only to take it and open the door.

ABBÉ. You are right, Mademoiselle, the key is there, as you say : but I can make no use of it, however much I would wish to.

CÉCILE. Ah ! I feel so faint.

ABBÉ. Good Heavens ! Try and calm yourself. I will go in search of the Baroness. Is it possible that some sad accident has befallen you so suddenly ! In heaven's name, Mademoiselle, answer me ; how do you feel ?

CÉCILE. I am ill ! I am ill !

ABBÉ. I cannot allow so charming a young person to expire in this way. I take it upon myself to open the door, and they may say what they please.

[*He opens the door.*

CÉCILE. I take it upon myself to be off, Abbé, and they may say what they please.

[*She runs out.*

SCENE III.—A WOOD.

Enter VAN BUCK and VALENTIN.

VAL. The moon is rising, and the storm has passed over. Look at those bright beads, how the warm breeze sets them rolling over the leaves ! The sand scarcely retains the impress of our feet, the thirsty soil has already drunk in the rain.

VAN B. We haven't dined so badly, for a chance wayside-inn. I stood sadly in need of that blazing fire ; it has brought back the

spring into my old legs. Well, my boy, are we coming to this place?

VAL. This is the end of our little walk, but, if you will take my advice, you will push on to that farm-house, where you see the light in the windows down there. You will seat yourself in the chimney-corner and order a big bowl of mulled wine with sugar and spice for us two.

VAN B. But you will keep me waiting too long. How long are you going to remain here? At least remember your promises, and be ready as soon as the horses come.

VAL. I swear to you I undertake neither more nor less than what we agreed upon. You see, uncle, how I give in to you, and try to do as you wish in everything. In fact a good dinner brings wisdom with it; I feel now that anger is sometimes a bad friend.—Concession on both sides—You allow me fifteen minutes of love-making and I renounce all my schemes of revenge. The little one will go home, we to Paris, and there will be the end of it all. As for that detested Baroness, I pardon her by forgetting her.

VAN B. Exactly so! And never fear that you shall have to go without a wife for all that. Who says that a silly old woman shall

ride rough-shod over respectable people who have made their fortune, and are not ill-favored either. Heavens ! What a lovely moonlight ! It brings back my young days to me.

VAL. This letter is not so bad, do you know ? The girl has wit and even something better ; yes, there is feeling in those three lines, something tender and bold, maidenly and brave, at the same time ; and the rendez-vous, too, which she assigns me is like her letter. Look at that thicket,—the sky,—this verdant nook in such a wild place, Ah ! The heart is a great master ! No man's thoughts are equal to its inspiration. And it was the heart that chose this place.

VAN B. I remember, when I was at the Hague, I had an adventure of this kind, My word ! She was a fine slip of a girl ! Over five foot high, and a regular bundle of delights. What Venuses those Flemish girls are ? They don't know what a woman is nowadays. All your Parisian beauties are as much cotton-wool as flesh.

VAL. I think I perceive lights moving down there among the trees. What can that mean ? Would they be tracking us at this time of night ?

VAN B. Oh, no doubt they are making

preparations for the ball that is to take place at the château this evening.

VAL. Let us separate, for greater safety. In half an hour at the farm-house.

VAN B. Agreed. Good luck to you, my boy! You shall tell me all about it, and we will make a song. That used to be our old way; not an adventure but verses were written about it. [Sings.

Eh! vraiment, oui, mademoiselle.

Eh! vraiment, oui, nous serons trois.

(VALENTIN goes away. Men carrying torches are seen ranging through the forest. Enter the BARONESS and the ABBÉ.)

BAR. It is as clear as day, she is mad. She has been seized with an attack of giddiness.

ABBÉ. She called out: "I am ill." You can fancy my position.

VAN B. (*singing.*)

"Il est donc bien vrai,
Charmente Colette,
Il est donc bien vrai
Que, pour votre fête,
Colin vous a fait—
Présent d'un bouquet."

BAR. And just at that moment, I see a carriage coming. I had no time to call Dupré. Dupré was not there. The carriage

drives in, they alight. It was the Marquise de Valangoujar and the Baron de Villebouzin.

ABBÉ. When I heard the first cry I hesitated; but what could I do? I saw her there, senseless, stretched on the floor; she was screaming, I had the key in my hand.

VAN B. (*singing.*)

Quand il vous l'offrit,
Charmante brunette,
Quand il vous l'offrit,
Petite Colette,
On dit qu'il vous prit—
Un frisson subit.

BAR. Can any one conceive such a thing? I ask you.—My daughter running away across the fields and thirty carriages driving up to the door at the same time! I shall never survive a thing like this!

ABBÉ. If I had even had time, I might, perhaps, have held her by her shawl,—or at least,—in fact, by my entreaties, by force of reasoning.

VAN B. (*singing*)

Dites à présent,
Charmante bergère,
Dites à présent
Que vous n'aimez guère
Qu'un amant constant—
Vous fasse un présent.

BAR. Is that you, Van Buck? Ah! my dear friend, we are lost. What is the meaning of this? My daughter is out of her mind, she is running about the fields! Could you imagine such a thing? I have forty people at my house; here I am on foot, and in this weather! You have not seen her in the wood? She has run away, it is like a dream; she had her hair dressed and powdered on one side only, her maid tells me. She has gone out in her white satin slippers, knocking down the Abbé, who was there, and passing over his body. I shall die of it. The servants can find no trace, and there is nothing more to be done; I must go back to the house. It couldn't, by any chance, be your nephew who would play us such a trick? I was rude to you;—let us say no more about it. Come! Help me, and we will make friends. You are my old friend, are you not? I am a mother, Van Buck. Ah! Cruel fortune! Cruel chance! What have I done to deserve this?

[She begins to weep.]

VAN B. Is it possible, Baroness? You alone and on foot! You looking for your daughter! Good God! You are weeping! Wretch that I am!

ABBÉ. Can you know anything about it,

Monsieur? For pity's sake, tell us all you know.

VAN B. Come, Baroness, take my arm and God grant we may find them. I will tell you all ; have no fear. My nephew is a man of honor, and all can yet be set right.

BAR. Ah, bah ! It was a rendez-vous ? The sly little minx ! Whom can I trust after this ?
[*They go off.*]

SCENE IV.—A GLADE IN THE WOOD.

CÉCILE *and* VALENTIN.

VAL. Who's there ? Cécile, is it you ?

CÉCILE. It is I. What is the meaning of these torches and lights among the trees ?

VAL. I don't know ; what does it matter ? It is nothing to us.

CÉCILE. Come over there, in the moonlight ; where you see that rock.

VAL. No, over there, under the shadow of those birches. It is possible that they may be looking for you, and you must be careful not to be seen.

CÉCILE. But then I should not see your face ; come, Valentin, obey.

VAL. Wherever you wish, you darling girl ; where you go I will follow. Do not

take from me that trembling hand, let my lips bring it comfort.

CÉCILE. I could not come sooner. Have you been waiting long for me?

VAL. Since the moon rose; look at this letter, all wet with tears, it is the one you wrote me.

CÉCILE. You story-teller! It is the wind and the rain that have wept on that paper.

VAL. No, Cécile, it was joy and love, it was happiness and longing. What troubles you? Why those looks? What are you looking for?

CÉCILE. Strange! I don't know where I am. Where is your uncle? I thought I saw him here.

VAL. My uncle has drunk too much Burgundy, your mother is far away, and all is quiet. This is the place you chose, and which your letter pointed out to me.

CÉCILE. Your uncle is drunk?—Why was he hiding in the hedge this morning?

VAL. This morning? Where? What do you mean? I was walking alone in the garden.

CÉCILE. This morning, when I spoke to you, your uncle was behind a tree. Didn't you know? I saw him as I turned the walk.

VAL. You must have been mistaken ; I saw nothing.

CÉCILE. Oh ! I saw him plainly ; he was pushing the branches aside ; perhaps it was to spy upon us.

VAL. How absurd ! You must have dreamt it. Let us not talk of it any more. Give me a kiss.

CÉCILE. Yes, dear, and with all my heart. Sit down near me. Tell me, why did you speak like that about my mother in your first letter ?

VAL. Forgive me ; it was in a moment of insanity and I was not master of myself.

CÉCILE. She asked me for the letter and I dared not show it to her ; I knew what would happen. But who could have told her ? She couldn't guess anything ; the letter was there, in my pocket.

VAL. Poor child ! They have treated you badly. It must have been your maid who betrayed you. Whom can we trust, in cases like this ?

CÉCILE. Oh no ! My maid is safe ; there was no need to give her money. But when you failed in respect for my mother you failed in respect for me.

VAL. Let us talk no more about it, since you pardon me. Let us not waste such precious moments. O my Cécile ! How lovely

you are, and how much of my happiness rests with you ! By what oaths, by what treasures can I repay your sweet caresses ? Ah ! my life itself would not be enough ! Come to my heart, let yours feel its beatings, and let this fair heaven carry them both to God !

CÉCILE. Yes, Valentin, my heart is sincere. Doesn't my hair smell sweet ? I have powder on that side, but I didn't take the time to put it on the other.—Why did you hide your name when you came to us ?

VAL. I can't tell you ; it was a whim, a wager I had made.

CÉCILE. A wager ! With whom ?

VAL. I know nothing more about it ;—what do these follies matter ?

CÉCILE. With your uncle, perhaps ; wasn't it ?

VAL. Yes. I loved you, and wished to know you, and to have no one between us.

CÉCILE. You were right. I would have done the same, in your place.

VAL. Why are you so inquisitive, and what is the good of all these questions ? Do you not love me, my sweet Cécile ? Answer me yes, and let everything be forgotten.

CÉCILE. Yes, dear, Cécile loves you, and she would wish to be more worthy of being loved ; but it is enough that she is loved by

you. Lay your two hands in mine. Why did you refuse to-day, when I asked you to stay to dinner ?

VAL. I wanted to start ; I had some business this evening.

CÉCILE. Not very important business, and not very far away, it seems to me, for you got out of your carriage at the end of the avenue.

VAL. You saw me ? How do you know ?

CÉCILE. Oh ! I was watching ? Why did you tell me you couldn't dance the mazurka ? I saw you dance it last winter.

VAL. Where ? I don't remember.

CÉCILE. At the fancy-dress ball at Madame de Gesvres'. How is it you don't remember ? You said in your letter, yesterday, that you had seen me last winter ; it was there.

VAL. You are right ; I remember now. Look how clear the night is ! How the breeze gently lifts this greedy gauze that surrounds your shoulders ! Listen ! It is the voice of the night, it is the song of the bird that invites to happiness. Behind that high rock no eyes can find us out. Everything sleeps except those who love. Allow my hand to remove this veil and my two arms to take its place.

CÉCILE. Yes, dear. Would that I could seem beautiful to you ! But do not take away your hand ; I feel that my heart is in mine, and goes to your heart by that way.— But why did you want to start off and pretend to be going to Paris ?

VAL. It was necessary ; it was for my uncle. Besides, dared I foresee that you would meet me here ? Oh ! how I trembled as I wrote that letter, and how I suffered while I waited for you !

CÉCILE. Why should I not come, when I know you are going to marry me ?

[VALENTIN rises and begins pacing up and down.

What is the matter with you ? What troubles you ? Come back and sit down by me.

VAL. Nothing is the matter with me. I thought—I thought I heard—I thought I saw some one in this direction.

CÉCILE. We are alone ; have no fear. Come then. Must I get up ? Have I said anything to offend you ? Your face looks different. Is it because I kept on my shawl when you wanted me to take it off ? It was because it is cold, and I am in my ball dress. Look at my satin slippers. What will poor Henriette think ? But what is the matter with you ? You don't answer. You are sad.

What can I have said to you? It is my fault, I can see.

VAL. No, I swear to you, Mademoiselle, you are mistaken. It was an involuntary thought that passed through my mind.

CÉCILE. But just now you did not call me "Mademoiselle"; you even spoke to me, I thought, in rather too light a tone. What is this bad thought which has suddenly struck you? Have I displeased you? I shall feel miserable if I have. But I don't think I have said anything wrong. Still, if you would rather walk, I will not remain seated. [*She rises.*] Give me your arm and let us walk about. Shall I tell you something? This morning I had had a nice cup of broth, that Henriette had made, sent up to your room. When I met you I told you about it, and I thought you didn't want to take it, and that you were displeased about it. I went along the walk three times;—did you see me?—Then you had gone upstairs. I went and stood in front of the parterre and I saw you through your window; you were holding the cup in both hands, and you drank it all at a draught. Didn't you? Did you like it?

VAL. Yes, little darling; it was the best broth in the world, it was as good as your heart and as you.

CÉCILE. Ah! When we are man and wife I will take care of you better than that. But, tell me, what was the meaning of your going and throwing yourself into a ditch and risking your life? And all for what? You knew you would be well received by us. That you should have wished to come all alone, I can understand; but what was the good of the rest? Was it because you like romances?

VAL. Sometimes. Let us sit down again.

[*They sit down.*]

CÉCILE. I confess I have no taste for them; those I have read have no meaning. It seems to me that they are only lies,—everything just invented at pleasure. They talk in them of nothing but seductions, underhand tricks, intrigues, and a thousand impossible things. All I like in them is the scenery; I admire the backgrounds but not the pictures. Now, for instance, this evening when I got your letter and saw that it was about a meeting in the wood, it is true that I gave way to a longing to come which certainly had a little of romance in it, but then it was because I also saw some solid advantage in it. If my mother knew,—and she will know,—you see they will have to let us marry. Even if your uncle has quarreled

with her they will have to make it up. I was ashamed of being locked up ;—and, indeed, why should I have been ?—The Abbé came and I pretended to be dying, he let me out, and I ran away. There is my stratagem ; I give it you for what it is worth.

VAL. (*aside.*) Am I a fox caught in his own trap, or a lunatic recovering his reason ?

CÉCILE. You don't answer me ?—Is this sadness going to last forever ?

VAL. You seem to me to be learned for your age, and yet as giddy as I, who am as giddy as the first stroke of matins.

CÉCILE. As for giddy, I must own it here ; but, my friend, it is because I love you. Shall I tell you something ? I knew that you loved me, and it was not only from yesterday that I suspected it. I only saw you three times at that ball ; but I have a heart, and I remember. You waltzed with Mlle. de Gesvres, and, as she was passing by the door, her Italian hair-pin knocked against the panel, and her hair all came down. You remember now ? Ungrateful ! The first word in your letter said that you remembered it. And how my heart did beat ! Now, believe me, that is what proves that a person loves, and that is *why I am* here.

VAL. (*aside.*) Either I have under my arm the cunningest demon hell ever vomited forth, or the voice that speaks to me is that of an angel and opens for me the road to heaven.

CÉCILE. Now as for *learned*,—that is another affair. But I will answer ; as you say nothing. Look ! Do you know what that is ?

VAL. What ? That star to the right of the tree ?

CÉCILE. No ; that one that scarcely shows itself and glistens like a tear.

VAL. You have been reading Madame de Staël ?

CÉCILE. Yes, and that word, *tear*, pleases me, I don't know why, like the stars. A beautiful clear sky always makes me feel inclined to weep.

VAL. And it makes me feel inclined to love you, and to tell you so, and to live for you. Cécile, do you know to whom you are speaking, and what kind of a man it is that dares to kiss you ?

CÉCILE. First tell me the name of my star. You shall not get off so easily as that.

VAL. Well then ! It is Venus, the star of love, the fairest pearl in all the ocean of night.

CÉCILE. No, no ! It is one more chaste,

and worthier of respect. You will learn to love it one day, when you live among farmers and have your own poor people to take care of. Admire it, and do not laugh ; it is Ceres, the goddess of bread.

VAL. Sweet child ! I can see your heart. You do works of charity, do you not ?

CÉCILE. It was my mother who taught me ; she is the best woman in the world.

VAL. Really ? I should not have thought it.

CÉCILE. Ah, my friend ! Neither would a great many others. You don't suspect what she is worth. People who have seen my mother for half-an-hour think to judge of her by some few chance words. She passes the day playing cards and the evening embroidering ; she would not leave her piquet for a prince ; but let Dupré come and whisper to her, and she will rise from the table, if it is a beggar who is waiting to see her. How often have we gone together, dressed in silk, as I am now, to tramp through the by-ways of the valley, carrying soup, and meat, and shoes, and linen for the poor ! How often have I seen the eyes of these unfortunates fill with tears when my mother looked at them in church ! There ! She has a right to be proud, and I have been proud of her sometimes.

VAL. You are still looking at that heavenly tear ; and so am I, but it is in your blue eyes.

CÉCILE. How big the sky is, and how happy the world is ! How calm and beneficent is nature !

VAL. Shall I give you some science too ? Shall I talk astronomy ? Tell me ; in that dust of worlds, is there one that does not know its way, that has not received its mission with its life,—one but must die in accomplishing it ? Why are not these immense heavens motionless ? Tell me, if there ever was one moment in which they were all created, in virtue of what force did they begin to move,—these worlds which will never cease to move ?

CÉCILE. By the Eternal Word.

VAL. By the eternal Love. The hand which suspends them in space has written but one law, in letters of fire. They live because they seek each other, and the suns would fall into dust if one among them ceased to love.

CÉCILE. Ah ! All life is there !

VAL. Yes, all life,—from the ocean, which lifts itself up beneath Diana's pale kisses, to the beetle, that jealously sleeps within its own cherished flower. Ask the forests and

the stones what they would say if they could speak. They have love in their hearts and cannot express it. I love you ! That is all I know, my darling ; that is what this flower will tell you, which chooses in the earth's bosom the juices that must nourish it, which throws away and puts off from it all the impure elements that would tarnish its freshness ! It knows that it must be beautiful in the daylight, and must die in its nuptial robe before the sun which created it. I know less than it of astronomy ; give me your hand, you know more of love.

CÉCILE. I hope, at least, that my wedding dress will not be *mortally* beautiful.—It seems to me that there are people prowling round about us.

VAL. No, all is quiet. Are you not afraid ? Did you come here without trembling ?

CÉCILE. Why ? What should I be afraid of ? Of you, or of the night ?

VAL. Why not of me ? What is there to reassure you ? I am young, you are beautiful, and we are alone.

CÉCILE. Well ! What harm is there in that ?

VAL. It is true ; there is no harm. Listen to me and let me kneel.

